

September 2023

**APPG ON WOMEN  
IN PARLIAMENT**



# Open House: Where next for gender equality in Parliament?

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## Full report

This Report was researched by Dr Minna Cowper-Coles, of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London, and Alex Shepherd and Zainab Asunramu of the Fawcett Society, and was written on a pro bono basis.

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many individuals who have helped to advise, comment and improve on this audit for their time, expertise and wisdom. In particular we would like to thank Dame Maria Miller, Professor Sarah Childs, Professor Rosie Campbell, Katy Barrett, Tom Chapman, Anne Foster, Molly Greenwood, Alison Groves, Philip Jones, Richard Kelly, Margaret Mackinnon, Ffion Morgan, Clare Mullin, Lloyd Owen, Sarah Petit, John Thursfield, Elise Uberoi and Mandy Vetì.

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# Foreword

In a world where democracy is under threat, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen democratic institutions at home, and one crucial element to any strong democracy is ensuring they are places where the full diversity of the population can be represented. The largest under-represented group in Parliament is women. Since women were first allowed to vote in national elections just over a century ago, we have made only slow inroads into the most important part of our democratic system, the House of Commons. Individual women have overcome substantial barriers of sexism and bias to have their voices heard but it remains the case that in the UK Parliament two men are elected for every one female MP. An assessment of the House of Lords is not part of this report but arguments in support of improved diversity in our scrutinising chamber are just as valid.

In the past 10 years, a series of reports and audits have changed the focus of the debate on female representation in Parliament from individual women, to consider the systemic institutional and organisational change needed to ensure more equal representation. Much focus has rightly been on the role of political parties and now all of the main political parties have put in place extensive programmes to help play their part in addressing this imbalance. But changing the people who are elected is only one part of the solution. Report after report has set out that only by reforming our democratic institutions themselves will we get lasting change.

Since the first such report was published in 2014 the proportion of women MPs has increased by just 12 percentage points. Within the Committees, governance structures and leadership of Parliament, there are women in many of the most senior positions. Perhaps most importantly, the Women and Equalities Committee has been established on a permanent basis to scrutinise the Government from the perspective of gender and equality. But for many women on the outside looking in, the House of Commons remains a place that looks out of step and not somewhere they would necessarily thrive and succeed. For those women who have been elected, their tenure is often shorter than their male counterparts, driven by a system that struggles to accommodate them.

This report shows the extent of the task ahead, 92 recommendations to over 29 different bodies and institutions are still outstanding from previous reports. Many of the important changes that have been identified are not happening quickly enough, running the risk that others outside of Parliament may seek to take on the responsibility of securing the change that is so clearly needed.

Parliamentarians have the opportunity to shape the future of this institution – an opportunity we must not squander – and this report lays out the areas we must consider. It is up to Members and others who work in key roles in Parliament to assess what this report lays out and implement the best solutions we can devise.

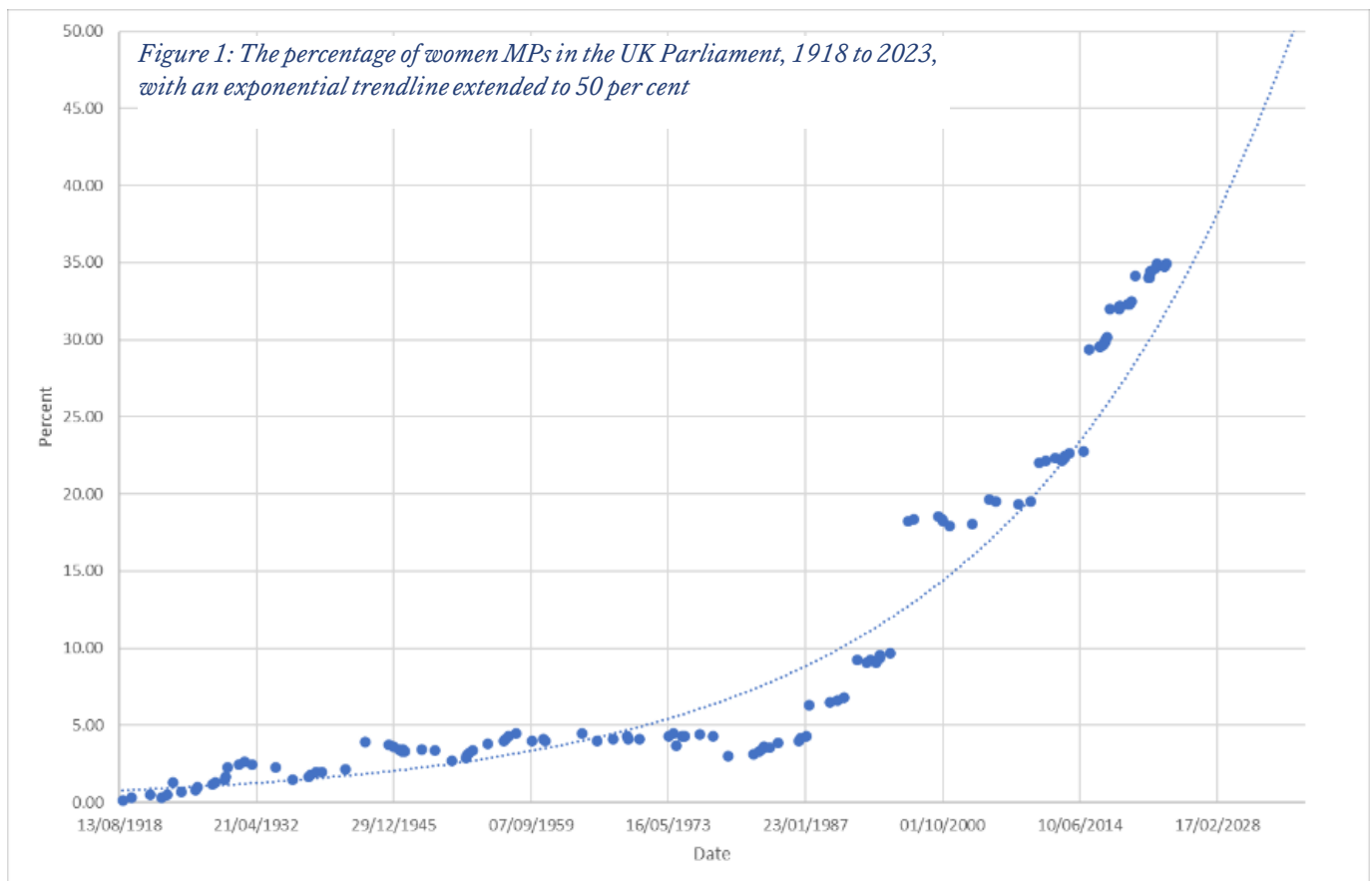
To date reforms have been piecemeal. That has to change, with an agreed plan to modernise the House of Commons as a workplace that attracts and retains the full diversity of the UK population. The key recommendation from this report is the creation of a new advisory group to the Speaker to carry out this role. With a single body to drive change, together with momentum from members and staff alike, there is hope that the House of Commons can become a truly representative part of our legislature where all MPs and staff can thrive in time for the centenary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act.

Rt Hon Dame Maria Miller MP

MP for Basingstoke, Chair of the Women in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group

# Introduction

In 2028 it will be 100 years since the Equal Franchise Act gave equal voting rights to women and men. In that time, the UK has had three women prime ministers, yet women are still profoundly underrepresented in the House of Commons, presently constituting 34 per cent of members (see Figure 1). The proportion of women in Parliament matters for reasons of political equality and for the quality of decisions the institution makes. Figure 1 shows how the percentage of women parliamentarians has increased since 1918, with step changes in the late 1990s and mid-2010s. However, it also points to the fact that even with continued exponential growth it will be hard to reach a point where women make up 50 per cent of MPs by 2028.



Research shows that in systems where men are overrepresented, legislative outputs are significantly different from those where there is greater gender equality.<sup>1</sup> Studies across a range of countries have shown that increased representation of women is correlated with lower mortality rates, better-quality sanitation provision, higher levels of female education and reduced levels of infant and child deaths.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, research has found that women MPs are more likely than men to speak about their constituents in the House of Commons, implying a closer relationship with those who elected them.<sup>3</sup> Without equal

<sup>1</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) *Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy*, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/women-political-leaders.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Clots-Figueras, I. (2012) 'Are Female Leaders Good for Education? Evidence from India', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 4(1), 212–244.

Lee, Y. J. (2018) 'Gender, Electoral Competition, and Sanitation in India', *Comparative Politics*, 50(4), 587–605.

Ng, E. and Muntaner, C. (2018) 'The effects of women in government on population health: An ecological analysis among Canadian provinces, 1976–2009', *Population Health*, 6, 141–148.

Swiss, Liam; Fallon, Kathleen M.; and Burgos, Giovanni (2012). 'Does Critical Mass Matter? Women's Political Representation and Child Health in Developing Countries', *Social Forces*, 91(2), 531–558.

<sup>3</sup> Holden Bates, S. and Sealey, A. (2019) 'Representing women, women representing: backbenchers' questions during Prime Minister's Questions, 1979–2010', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, vol 2, no 2, 237–256.

[https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/configurable/content/journals\\$002fejpe\\$002f2\\$002f2\\$002farticle-p237.xml?t:ac=journals%24002fejpe\\$002f2\\$002f2\\$002farticle-p237.xml](https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/configurable/content/journals$002fejpe$002f2$002f2$002farticle-p237.xml?t:ac=journals%24002fejpe$002f2$002f2$002farticle-p237.xml)

representation, women's views and priorities are not adequately considered during the legislative process, undermining our democracy. Importantly, it is not just women who are underrepresented in Parliament. People with disabilities, belonging to an ethnic minority and those educated in the state system are underrepresented in relation to the UK population, and action should be taken to address this.

The importance of women's equal political representation has been understood for a long time by both scholars and politicians. There is no one simple fix that can remedy the underrepresentation of women. There are numerous contributing factors, from the role played by political parties to the wider socio-economic and cultural barriers that women face.<sup>4</sup> But it is crucial that the UK Parliament itself addresses any barriers which might be stopping women from all backgrounds from full participation in our elected chamber.

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<sup>4</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) *Women Political Leaders*.

## About this report

*Open House* is an audit of the UK House of Commons in relation to the recommendations made in 11 reports, dating from 2014 to the present, which aim to improve gender diversity in the House and Parliament, support women MPs, and highlight international best practice.<sup>5</sup> This report outlines where action has been taken and points to where more work needs to be done. It is the first time an audit of the previous audits has been conducted, and it represents a starting point for a longer-term review system that ensures momentum to implement these and future recommendations continues.

The recommendations from each of these reports are grouped into four themes, to address issues relating to equality of participation, infrastructure, culture and women's substantive representation. Recommendations range from measures to increase the diversity of members, through to provisions for work-life balance, addressing harassment and bullying, and ensuring that data on diversity is being collected and published. The recommendations encompass measures to help people with caring responsibilities and disabilities, and to ensure an intersectional approach is taken when addressing women's underrepresentation.

The scope of this report is limited to the House of Commons and the wider parliamentary context, reflecting the focus of past reports on the elected chamber of Parliament. It does not cover the House of Lords, political parties or other key agents, though they are clearly also worthy of attention.

### The reports that inform this analysis

*Improving Parliament* (2014)

*The Good Parliament* (2016)

*UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit* (2018)

*Equality in the heart of democracy* (2022)

*The Remotely Representative House* (2021)

*A House for Everyone* (2023)

*Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians* (2016)

*Plan of action* (2017)

*Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines* (2020)

*Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament* (2021)

*Effective and Inclusive Parliaments.* (2022)

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<sup>5</sup> Four reports that look to improve the diversity of the UK Parliament form the basis of this analysis:

All Party Parliamentary Group Women in Parliament (2014) *Improving Parliament: Creating a Better and More Representative House*.

<https://issuu.com/appgwinp/docs/appg-report-online-final/1>

Childs, S. (2016) *The Good Parliament*. <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/news/2016/july/20%20Jul%20Prof%20Sarah%20Childs%20The%20Good%20Parliament%20report.pdf>

Gender-sensitive parliament audit panel to the House of Commons Commission and the House of Lords Commission & IPU (2018) *UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit* 2018. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-information-office/uk-parliament-gender-sensitive-parliament-audit-report-digital.pdf>

Women and Equalities Committee (2022) *Equality in the heart of democracy: A gender sensitive House of Commons*.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9008/documents/159011/default/>

These are supplemented by seven further reports, two of which are directed at the UK Parliament:

Smith, J. and Childs, S. (2021) *The Remotely Representative House: Lesson Learning from the Hybrid Parliament*.

<https://centenaryaction.org.uk/publications/remotely-representative-parliament-lesson-learning-from-the-hybrid-parliament/>

Shepherd, A., Ville, L., Maren, C., Whitelock-Gibbs, A. and Bazeley, A. (2023) *A House for Everyone: A Case for Modernising Parliament*, The Fawcett Society. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=0ebb1e86-c3f9-4e41-8bc5-740cee1181cc>

The remaining five take a more international perspective:

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians*.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

# Overview of findings

Table 1: The extent to which recommendations made in previous reports have been met

Category	Proposed action areas	Recommendations			TOTAL
		not met	partially met	largely met	
Equality of participation	Increasing diversity of Members	3	4	0	7
	Women in committees and leadership positions	0	2	0	2
Infrastructure	Infrastructure for a gender-sensitive Parliament	2	2	0	4
	Predictability, flexibility, time and work	3	2	0	5
	Parents and carers in Parliament	1	3	0	4
Culture	Abuse, harassment and bullying within Parliament	1	2	1	4
	Protections from external abuse	0	1	1	2
	Inclusive facilities, culture and practices	1	2	1	4
Women's substantive representation	Gender-sensitive and intersectional policymaking	1	2	1	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>36</b>

## 1. Equality of participation

The most fundamental aspect of gender equality in the House of Commons is ensuring that women are able to enter the House as members and participate fully once elected. There is important work being done by the parliamentary Education and Engagement Team, but some concrete actions are required which will help attract a greater diversity of MPs and level the

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Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017) *Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments*. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/plan-action-gender-sensitive-parliaments>

Childs, S. (2020) *Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change*, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. <https://www.cpahq.org/media/s20jllws/cwp-gender-sensitizing-guidelines.pdf>

OSCE/ODIHR (2021) *Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region*. [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/506885\\_2.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/506885_2.pdf)

Smith, J. (2022) *Effective and Inclusive Parliaments*, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. <https://www.uk-cpa.org/media/4661/effective-and-inclusive-parliaments-final.pdf>



playing field for potential candidates, particularly those with disabilities. There has been significant progress over the last 10 years in the proportion of women within select committees and in leadership positions, but there should be safeguards in place to ensure a degree of balance into the future. The key outstanding recommendations within this category that have not been implemented include:

- Enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires political parties to report the diversity of their candidates.
- Reintroduce financial support for disabled candidates to remedy the closing of the Access to Elected Office Fund.
- Take steps to improve media coverage of Parliament, through ensuring there is greater gender balance in the members of the press given access to Parliament, and through a review of sexism in the UK media.
- Formalise rules to ensure gender equality in parliamentary leadership positions.
- Formalise rules to ensure gender equality in select committee membership and witnesses.

## 2. Infrastructure

It is crucial that those who have been elected to the House of Commons are supported to participate fully with infrastructure that accommodates their needs and responsibilities. The House has been slow to adapt to such needs, but it can and does change when there is leadership and inter-party agreement over reforms. For example, proxy voting and additional funds to cover constituency work have recently been granted to new parents. Enabling and supporting MPs who are mothers is important: historically the “mother of parliaments” has largely been absent of mothers,<sup>6</sup> and there is still a long way to go. Parliamentary workloads and schedules make the life of an MP difficult to balance with other care responsibilities. Numerous potential solutions have been recommended in the key reports which form the basis of this audit. These range from greater predictability to the introduction of remote working and voting measures and grouped voting times. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic provided the House of Commons with the impetus to trial many of the strategies suggested, however all measures brought in during the pandemic have been rolled back without review. There is therefore a need to:

- Create a new advisory group to the Speaker to push forward the gender-sensitive Parliament agenda.
- Undertake a published review of Covid-19 measures for their impact on diversity and reintroduce measures which improve predictability and flexibility.
- Conduct regular audits of the gender-sensitivity of Parliament to assess the adequacy of child-friendly provisions.
- Review sitting days and hours.
- Review voting practices.

## 3. Culture

It is important to ensure that in Parliament, as in any other workplace, those working there can do so without fear for their safety, free from abuse and harassment, and that the overall culture is welcoming of people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs. For MPs, the question of safety and security extends beyond Parliament into their constituency offices. The tragic murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess show that security threats to MPs are real and must be taken seriously. The security provided by Parliament must extend as far as possible to cover MPs in Parliament as well as in the constituency as well

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<sup>6</sup> Campbell, R. and Childs, S. (2014) ‘Parents in Parliament: ‘Where’s Mum?’’, *The Political Quarterly*, vol 85 (4).  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264501243\\_Parents\\_in\\_Parliament\\_Where's\\_Mum](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264501243_Parents_in_Parliament_Where's_Mum)

as their staff. Safety and security are highly gendered, with women often suffering greater online abuse, and facing threats of a more sexualised nature. Women from ethnic minorities tend to suffer an even greater degree of abuse online of both a sexist and a racist nature. There are deep-seated issues within Parliament regarding bullying, harassment and sexual abuse which must be addressed.

There have been important developments within Parliament which aim to make it a safer, more welcoming and supportive environment. Most prominent is the creation of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) for addressing complaints of bullying, sexual harassment and abuse. The creation of this body marks significant progress. However, ongoing allegations of harassment and abuse attest to the fact that the underlying cultural change has not yet taken place. Elsewhere in Parliament, small but important steps have been made over the last decade in diversifying the art collection and redesigning the identity cards, which help create a more inclusive environment.

These are the key outstanding recommendations in this area:

- Continue to regularly review the effectiveness of the ICGS and take action to address areas where it is not working.
- Require MPs to make a commitment to uphold the *Behaviour Code* and promote an inclusive workplace culture.
- Consider requiring current training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the *Online Safety Bill* and *Elections Act*.
- Consider alternative formats for prime minister's questions where professional behaviour is encouraged.
- Conduct an inquiry into the gender sensitivity of parliamentary rituals, practices, ceremonies and language to improve transparency, with recommendations on where changes need to be made to make Parliament more inclusive.

### Major progress since 2014

1. *The establishment, on a permanent basis, of the Women and Equalities Committee.*
2. *The setting up of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme for reporting and holding perpetrators accountable for abuse, harassment and bullying.*
3. *The introduction and expansion of the proxy voting scheme for MPs on baby leave, and additional Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority funding for staff to cover MPs constituency work while caring for a new-born.*

## 4. Women's substantive representation

When there are more women in the House of Commons, women's views should be better represented in the legislative process. Studies show that numbers are important, but not always sufficient, for seeing an increase in gender responsiveness in the legislation.<sup>7</sup> Within the context of Parliament, the provision of information and institutions can support and amplify the ability of parliamentarians to ensure legislation is sensitive to gender differences, and to create policies which represent the needs of women.

There has been one major point of progress in the last 10 years, and that is the establishment of the Women and Equalities Committee on a permanent basis in 2017. This fulfils recommendations from previous reports. The areas which still need work are around providing the expertise to MPs and their staff so they are better able to draft, scrutinise and amend legislation from a gender perspective. Recommendations include:

<sup>7</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) *Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy*.

- Introducing – and potentially making mandatory – training in gender analysis, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender impact assessments, gender-sensitive public consultations, unconscious bias and equality legislation for all members and staff.
- Ensuring there is well signposted information and expertise on gender equality available to members and their staff, through technical research units, expertise within the House of Commons Library, research staff in Parliament, or through formalised relationships with external gender experts.
- Requiring legislation to be informed by equality impact assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting and targeted public consultations.
- Creating a women’s caucus to better promote the women’s agenda.

## Key recommendations

1. Establish a body, namely an advisory group to the Speaker, with the necessary legitimacy, authority and resources to lead and push forward the gender-sensitive Parliament agenda and oversee regular future audits.
2. Secure a formal pledge from party leaders and the government to bring about a gender-equal House of Commons by 2028, identifying the specific measures each party will adopt to achieve this.
3. Undertake a published review of measures brought in during the pandemic for their impact on diversity and reintroduce those measures which improve predictability.

# Equality of participation

The most fundamental aspect of achieving gender equality in the House of Commons is ensuring that women are able to enter the House as Members and participate fully once elected. The *Increasing diversity of members* section sets out recommendations to this end from previous reports and highlights where recommendations have and have not been met. The focus is on the role of Parliament in encouraging and enabling a more representative proportion of the population to engage in and actively seek out a role in politics.

There are important actions that can and should be taken by Parliament and the government to help improve the gender diversity of Parliament. Parliament should work to ensure that all of the population believe that ‘people like me’ are able to become MPs, further they can set up structures to support those who face additional barriers to becoming MPs. There is important work being done by the parliamentary Education and Engagement Team, but some concrete actions are required which will help attract a greater diversity of MPs and level the playing field for potential candidates, particularly those with disabilities.

The *Women in committees and leadership positions* section highlights the importance of having equal participation of women within select committees and in leadership positions. There has been significant progress over the last 10 years in the proportion of women within select committees and in leadership positions, but there should be safeguards in place to ensure a degree of balance into the future.

## Key recommendations

1. Enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires political parties to report the diversity of their candidates.
2. Reintroduce financial support for disabled candidates to remedy the closing of the Access to Elected Office Fund.
3. Take steps to improve media coverage of Parliament, through ensuring there is greater gender balance in the members of the press given access to Parliament, and through a review of sexism in the UK media.
4. Formalise rules to ensure gender equality in parliamentary leadership positions.
5. Formalise rule to ensure gender equality in select committee membership and witnesses.

## Increasing diversity of Members

	Sources for the recommendations										Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports						International Best Practice						
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	The Remotely Representative House (2021)	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)			
Positive measures to increase diversity	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		
Funding to support diverse candidates	X	X	X			X					X		
Support for disabled MPs	X	X		X	X					X		X	
Support and development for MPs and staff	X	X	X			X	X					X	
Improve media coverage of Parliament	X	X									X		
Encourage youth engagement in political affairs	X											X	
Showcase diversity of MPs, their role and impact to the public	X	X	X				X					X	

## Positive measures to increase diversity

Rating: Recommendations not met

### Background

Parliament is now nearing the centenary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act when women were equally granted the right to vote, yet women are still considerably underrepresented in the House of Commons. The government and political parties should seize this moment to act to ensure a diverse Parliament.

Research shows that the most effective way to progress gender equality in parliament, although other measures can also be effective, is through the introduction of legislative quotas, with a placement mandate.<sup>8</sup> In the UK these have never been introduced, however the Labour Party has used a party quota - a policy of using all-women shortlists for half of all winnable seats. This is permitted until 2030 through the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 and the Equality Act 2010.

As the parliamentary Labour Party has reached 50 percent women, all-women shortlists can no longer be used by Labour. For comparison with Labour, in the House of Commons 25 percent of the Conservative Party, 36 percent of the SNP and 64 percent of the Liberal Democrats are women. Crucially, to increase the diversity of parliamentarians, there needs to be greater transparency on the whole journey to becoming an MP, starting from before candidate selection.

### Outstanding recommendations

- New Advisory Group: Secure a cross party commitment to increasing the number of women MPs in lead up to the next general election.<sup>9</sup>
- Government: Enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires political parties to report the diversity of their selected candidates.<sup>10</sup>
- Government: Introduce statutory sex/gender quotas for parliamentary candidates.<sup>11</sup>
- Government: Introduce permissive legislation to allow for party quotas for other under-represented groups.<sup>12</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

The easiest action to implement is that the government should enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, so that data on candidates can be collected. It is important to understand the make up of candidates to achieve greater diversity amongst parliamentarians.

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<sup>8</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) *Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy*.

Dahlerup, D. (2020) *Women in Decision-Making in Public Life: Types, Usage and Effects of Temporary Special Measures, Including Gender Quotas*, UN Women.

[https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/EGM/Dahlerup\\_TSMs\\_EP3\\_EGMCSW65.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/EGM/Dahlerup_TSMs_EP3_EGMCSW65.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> "To The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion: Secure a cross-party concord regarding candidate selection for the 2020 Parliament following the boundary review: all political parties should seek to increase the percentage of its women MPs – at the absolute minimum all parties currently represented in the House should maintain existing percentages of women MPs." (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Equality Act 2010, Section 106, legislation.gov.uk <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/106>

"To the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities: Immediately commence Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 (which requires political parties to provide data relating to parliamentary candidates)" "To the Women and Equalities Committee: Call the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities before the Committee regarding commencement of Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"To assist with this monitoring, we add our voice to calls to implement section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires parties to publish data on the diversity of candidates standing for election." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

"We echo the The Good Parliament report, the UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018, our predecessor Committee and witnesses to our inquiry, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission, in recommending the Government enact without further delay section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 on diversity data of candidates." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-22);

"Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: Parliamentary candidate diversity data (gender, ethnicity, education, profession, motherhood, fatherhood, age, disability, sexuality)" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020) "Commence s106 of the Equality Act 2010, requiring political parties to collect and report candidate monitoring data – including candidates selected by each party, those elected and those that fail to be elected – so we have an accurate picture on the diversity of political candidates. This must be accompanied by cultural change which fosters more inclusive workplace environments as societal prejudice and stereotypes can mean that people are uncomfortable with disclosing this information." (A House for Everyone 2023);

<sup>11</sup> "Ask for a Parliamentary debate to discuss prescriptive quotas in the House of Commons" (Improving Parliament 2014);

"Introduce prior to dissolution for the 2020 general election statutory sex/ gender quotas to take effect for the 2025 general election if, three months prior to the 2020 general election, political parties currently represented in Parliament have failed to select at least 50 percent women in a party's 'vacant held' and 'target seats'" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"Adopt special measures to ensure that higher numbers of women are selected by parties to run in "winnable" seats, and propose amendments to electoral laws and national constitutions that provide for reserved seats." (Plan of Action 2017);

"Adopt measures that support fifty-fifty gender balance in parliament" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>12</sup> "Introduce permissive legislation to allow for party quotas for other under-represented groups, where parties have failed to select proportional percentages of candidates from these groups." (The Good Parliament 2016)

## Funding to support diverse candidates

### Rating: Recommendations not met

#### Background

The costs of becoming an MP are much higher for those with disabilities and are more difficult to meet for those who do not come from privileged backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary funding is one tool that can help remedy these disparities and better enable diverse candidates to become MPs. The Access to Elected Office Fund granted disabled candidates between £250 and £40,000 to cover disability-related costs when standing as candidates, to help make campaigning more equitable. This fund has now been closed.<sup>14</sup>

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Government: Create a permanent fund to help create a diverse and more representative Parliament – with particular emphasis on financial support for disabled people to stand for election.<sup>15</sup>
- Government: Regularly assess and improve effectiveness of funding provided.<sup>16</sup>

#### Discussion and recommended actions

Reinstating the Access to Elected Office Fund is a key first step in addressing the barriers facing disabled candidates, further this fund should be regularly assessed and improved to ensure its effectiveness.

Funding should be assessed and broadened to include other candidates facing financial barriers to entering Parliament.

## Support for disabled MPs

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Disabled MPs are substantially under-represented in Parliament, thereby undermining the representative nature of our democratic institutions and processes.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the questions around funding addressed above, numerous reports have pointed to the need for an examination of the inclusivity of Parliament's facilities alongside its broader culture and ways of working.<sup>18</sup> Permitting job-sharing arrangements for MPs is a key recommendation by Disability Politics UK and this will be covered in more detail below.<sup>19</sup> Further, the hybrid working arrangements introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic and which expired on 22 July 2021, are likely to have made participation easier for those with disabilities. As such a full review of

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<sup>13</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) *Women Political Leaders*;

Government Equalities Office (2021) *Barriers to elected office for disabled people*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/barriers-to-elected-office-for-disabled-people/barriers-to-elected-office-for-disabled-people>

<sup>14</sup> Access to Elected Office Fund <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-elected-office-fund>

<sup>15</sup> "Create a Democracy Diversity Fund to help create a diverse and more representative Parliament." (Improving Parliament 2014);

"Extend the Access to Elected Office Fund (beyond Summer 2019)" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

"Reinstate a formalised funding scheme for disabled candidates in England" (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>16</sup> "Clarify the status and effectiveness of the Access to Elected Office Fund for supporting disabled people to stand for election as local councillors or MPs." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"As part of [the fund to support disabled candidates] the "Cabinet Office must work with disabled people, and disabled women in particular, involved in politics to improve the process around the Fund." (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Centenary Action Group (2022) *Overcoming the barriers to disabled women's involvement in politics*. <https://centenaryaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/CAG-Overcoming-the-barriers-to-womens-involvement-in-politics.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The Good Parliament 2016; UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018; Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022; The Remotely Representative House 2021; Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022;

<sup>19</sup> Disability Politics UK website <https://www.disabilitypolitics.org.uk/>

"Review the possibility of job sharing for MPs and Ministers" (Improving Parliament 2014)



the impact into these online measures as recommended below is also important for improving possibilities for participation for disabled people.<sup>20</sup> Many hybrid features have been retained in the House of Lords.

There has been some progress in related areas. IPSA now provides an absence budget which entitles MPs with a serious illness to fund cover for their office during their absence, and proxy voting for those with long-term illnesses has been recommended for continuation after the latest pilot.<sup>21</sup> IPSA also provides disability assistance which can be used for staff costs or other equipment, travel costs etc required by disabled MPs.<sup>22</sup>

### Outstanding Recommendation

- Members' Services Team, House of Commons Commission and Commons Executive Board: Survey MPs on the adequacy of facilities in meeting the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions – and act on findings.<sup>23</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action

An assessment is required to ensure that the facilities in Parliament fully meet the needs of those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. This should be done to meet the needs of any new MPs elected at the next election.

Broader reforms to improve Parliament's culture in relation to working hours and ways of working, which are outlined later in the report, are also crucial to supporting greater inclusion and diversity in Parliament.

## Support and Development for MPs and staff

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Support and development for MPs starts with induction and should continue throughout their parliamentary careers. If training and support are available and well signposted to all MPs, it helps to ensure that none are unfairly disadvantaged.

Currently, Members' training is led by the Members' Services Team – typically induction training is offered post-election with ongoing training/support offered according to the concerns identified by MPs. The Member Services Team also offers an HR service for members and mental health and wellbeing support.<sup>24</sup> At present the training provision does not include training on leadership, public speaking, media training, parliamentary procedure, gender sensitivity, gender budgeting or gender <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Proper consideration should be given to the benefits of retaining aspects of [Covid 19 procedures]... procedure is a matter for the House as a whole and MPs should be given the opportunity to make their personal experiences and views known, free from party political considerations" (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022).

"Research should be undertaken either (a) in-house or (b) through the commissioning of independent research, to assess the relative effectiveness of virtual, hybrid and in-person Select Committees, including the effect on witness diversity, Committee cohesion, committee efficiency, and scrutiny and impact" "Commission research into how comparable parliaments enable 'spontaneity' in virtual and/or hybrid debate proceedings, identify and publish international 'best practice'" (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

"Review all measures introduced during COVID to see the impact on equality and diversity, and make results public ... Collate, analyse and make publicly available data on the diversity impact of all COVID-19 procedures and reforms, specifying differential use by members of the different ways of virtual working" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>21</sup> House of Commons Procedure Committee (2023) Proxy voting: Review of illness and injury pilot

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/34383/documents/189382/default/>

<sup>22</sup> Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (2023) The Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs 2023-2024

[https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/1RGgHNvfnvqhVRXIFTZvDk/583a6973a70ff7707f6ea0686928a6fd/Sixteenth\\_Edition\\_of\\_the\\_Scheme\\_2023-24.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/1RGgHNvfnvqhVRXIFTZvDk/583a6973a70ff7707f6ea0686928a6fd/Sixteenth_Edition_of_the_Scheme_2023-24.pdf)

"Consider additional staffing budgets and resources for Members if they have, for example, a long-term illness." (Improving Parliament 2014)

<sup>23</sup> [Conduct a survey of MPs on:] "the adequacy of facilities including toilets; ... the extent to which the facilities of the House of Commons meet the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions;" (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>24</sup> Communication with a representative of Members' Services Team.

<sup>25</sup> Communication with a representative of Members' Services Team.

## Outstanding Recommendations

- General Election Planning Group and Members' Services Team: Provide a robust induction process for new MPs, with particular support aimed at women and those from other underrepresented groups.<sup>26</sup>
- Members' Services Team and House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team: Expand provision of Continuous Professional Development and training for MPs and staff, to include unconscious bias training, parliamentary procedure, best practice on public speaking, voice coaching, equality legislation, equality and diversity, witness questioning techniques, gender analysis, gender impact assessments, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender-sensitive public consultations and media interviews.<sup>27</sup>
- Members' Services Team and House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team: Ensure MPs and staff are aware of the in-House training and support and funding available to them as well as where and how they can access the groups and organisations within Parliament with specialist knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

## Discussion and Recommended Action.

A thorough induction and ongoing training process for MPs and their staff is essential to ensure that any discrepancies in knowledge or skills for any incoming MPs and their staff – or those returning from an extended period of leave – are not detrimental in the long-term and can be helpful for MPs' and their staff's careers after leaving Parliament.<sup>29</sup> All MPs should have equalities training to enable them to be good MPs. Importantly this support and training must be well signposted so that all MPs and their staff are made aware of what is on offer.

Currently the training and support provided through Members' Services is under review. The system as it stands tends to be directed by requests from MPs. A more pro-active approach should be taken to ensure a broader range of trainings are available to all MPs and their staff with particular consideration being given to the needs of those from underrepresented groups and those returning from extended leave.

Training on gender mainstreaming, budgeting and policy development, discussed in more detail below, will ensure that MPs and staff are embedding intersectional gender analysis into their work practices, helping to realise a truly gender sensitive Parliament.

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<sup>26</sup> *"The Speaker to have an expanded role in the induction process to encourage better attendance at the induction sessions for MPs and staff"* (Improving Parliament 2014);

*"Support the development of a residential 'Introduction to being an MP' programme for under-represented groups"* (The Good Parliament 2016)

*"Ensure that induction for new members is gender-sensitive. This could take the form of mentoring for new women parliamentarians, pairing women with experienced parliamentarians (men or women) or presentations by senior women parliamentarians on strategies to cope in the parliamentary environment."* (Plan of Action 2017);

*"[House of Commons Service] Work with political parties to review and institutionalise the professional and pastoral support currently offered to MPs including, expanding the offer to focus on induction,"* (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>27</sup> *"expand the provision of Continuous Professional Development for MPs, including unconscious bias training"* *"Expand and improve the in-House training for MPs to include parliamentary procedure, best practice on public speaking, voice coaching and media interviews"* (Improving Parliament 2014);

*"Maximise Member opportunities, capacities and capabilities via Continuous Professional Development (CPD)"* (The Good Parliament 2016);

*"Existing Continuous Professional Development options for MPs... should... include, for example, unconscious bias, equality legislation and witness questioning techniques."* *"opportunities for development should be advertised and awarded in a transparent manner so as to be genuinely open to all staff, regardless of their circumstances."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

*"Offer MPs, parliamentary and political staff professional development courses in gender analysis, gender impact assessments and gender-sensitive public consultations."* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021);

*"Institute voluntary training on gender budgeting and mainstreaming within/alongside equality and diversity training for both staff and Members, if not already being offered."* (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022);

*"[House of Commons Service] Work with political parties to review and institutionalise the professional and pastoral support currently offered to MPs including... ongoing professional development training"* (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>28</sup> *"Raise awareness... of Continuous Professional Development for MPs"* *"Better communicate to Members and their staff the scope and limits of IPSA rules and allowances"* (Improving Parliament 2014);

*"Existing Continuous Professional Development options for MPs... should be publicised"* *"Information should be readily available, accessible in one place and well signposted to enable parliamentarians and their staff to access the different groups and organisations in Parliament with specialist knowledge."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

<sup>29</sup> House of Commons Administration Committee (2023) 'Smoothing the cliff edge: supporting MPs at their point of departure from elected office' First report of the session 2022-2023 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/33889/documents/185884/default/>

In addition to their constituency and parliamentary responsibilities MPs' also must fulfil their duties as employers, responsible for managing staff and running two workplaces. Supports are offered through the Members' Services Team – the Speaker's Conference has recommended that these supports are expanded.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kelly, Richard (2023) Speaker's Conference on the employment conditions of Members' staff, House of Commons Library <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9572/CBP-9572.pdf>

## Improve Media Coverage of Parliament

**Rating: Recommendations not met**

### Background

Media coverage of women parliamentarians often overly focuses on their private lives and appearance. This has a negative impact on the perception of women in politics and the participation and retention of women in politics, thereby undermining the representative nature of our democracy.<sup>31</sup> The reports recommend that Parliament acts through the granting of press passes and a review of sexism in the UK media. Neither of these actions have been undertaken to date. In 2022, men still made up 65 percent of lobby journalists.<sup>32</sup>

### Outstanding Recommendations

- Speaker: Ensure a more gender-balanced parliamentary press gallery.<sup>33</sup>
- Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee working with Women and Equalities Committee: Review sexism in the UK media, including political coverage of female parliamentarians and make recommendations to government and Independent Press Standards Organisation.<sup>34</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action

Addressing bias and sexism in the press is key to improving the reputation of Parliament and encouraging more women to stand. By introducing a gender-balance requirement for press passes and conducting a review into sexism in the UK media including political coverage of UK parliamentarians, Parliament could take proactive steps to address this coverage without hindering free speech.

## Encourage Youth Engagement in Political Affairs

**Rating: Recommendations partially met**

### Background

If more diverse young people engage in politics, we are more likely to see a greater diversity of MPs in the future. The Education and Engagement Team works with schools across the country to inform them of what Parliament does and how it works including with school trips to Parliament. Parliament continues to host a youth parliament in the House of Commons Chamber each year.<sup>35</sup> However there is certainly scope for more to be done at the school level to encourage engagement with democracy.

### Outstanding Recommendations

- Government: Consider what more can be done in state-funded schools and academies to teach children about engaging in democracy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> International IDEA (2022) Women in Politics and the Media <https://www.idea.int/news-media/news/women-politics-and-media>

<sup>32</sup> Institute for Government (2022) *Parliamentary lobby* <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainer/parliamentary-lobby>

<sup>33</sup> “*To the Speaker: Target a representative Parliamentary Press Gallery (Lobby journalists). Neither women nor men should be in receipt of less than 40 percent of lobby passes by 2020*” (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>34</sup> “*Request that the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and the Independent Press Standards Organisation review sexism in the UK media and social media, including political coverage of female parliamentarians*” (Improving Parliament 2014)

<sup>35</sup> “*Continue to host an annual Youth Parliament meeting in the House of Commons Chamber.*” (Improving Parliament 2014)

UK Youth Parliament House of Commons <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament/house-of-commons>

<sup>36</sup> “*Ask the Secretary of State for Education to consider what more can be achieved in all state funded schools, academies and free schools to support debating societies, public speaking events, school councils and to teach about engaging in democracy.*” (Improving Parliament 2014)

### **Discussion and Recommended Action**

The government should consider what more can be done to ensure engagement in politics among young girls and boys at the school level. Previous reports have suggested school councils, public speaking and debating societies as important but broader forms of engagement in politics should also be considered.

## Showcase Diversity of MPs, Their Role and Impact to the Public

**Rating: Recommendations partially met**

### Background

When women are highly visible in politics it can encourage political engagement among women in the public.<sup>37</sup> How Parliament presents itself to the public will have an impact on engagement of young women and the public more broadly in politics, as such gender -and all other forms of diversity - should be highlighted for the public.

The Education and Engagement Team works with groups across the country, providing information on how Parliament works. They target in particular groups with lower levels of political engagement, including young people, people with disabilities, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Black and Minority Ethnic people and women. Online materials have been produced which clarify the role of MPs and ensure diversity is highlighted, which go some way to addressing the recommendations in this area.<sup>38</sup> Further, to celebrate the centenary of women getting the right to vote, the Education and Engagement Team ran a campaign called Vote 100.<sup>39</sup>

### Outstanding Recommendations

- Education and Engagement Team and Parliamentary Digital Service: Continue efforts to produce website materials and a communications and outreach strategy to highlight the diversity of MPs, their impact, to clarify further the role of an MP and to promote women parliamentarians as role models.<sup>40</sup>
- Education and Engagement Team: Improve engagement with organisations supporting the increased diversity and inclusivity of Parliament.<sup>41</sup>
- Education and Engagement Team: Conduct awareness-raising to emphasise the importance of women's representation in Parliament.<sup>42</sup>
- Education and Engagement Team: Support mentorship programmes.<sup>43</sup>
- New Advisory Group: Encourage men's participation and championing of gender equality for example in events pertaining to gender diversity.<sup>44</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action

Some work has been done to improve awareness of the role of MPs and their diversity in online materials. There were particular efforts made in the lead up to the centenary anniversary of the Representation of the People Act in 2018. However greater

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<sup>37</sup> Ian McAllister (2019) 'The gender gap in political knowledge revisited: Australia's Julia Gillard as a natural experiment' *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2(2) pp. 197-220

<sup>38</sup> UK Parliament, What do MPs do? <https://www.parliament.uk/about/mps-and-lords/members/mps>

UK Parliament (2022) How the UK Parliament Works [https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-information-office/leaflets/how\\_the\\_uk\\_parliament\\_works\\_june22.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-information-office/leaflets/how_the_uk_parliament_works_june22.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> UK Parliament, Vote 100 <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/vote-100/>

<sup>40</sup> "Improve the online gateway to Parliament with a new 'Being a MP' section on the Parliament website." (Improving Parliament 2014); "Support the production of comprehensive website materials showing that a diversity of people are, and can be, MPs." "Publish a series of statements detailing and promoting the role and work of MPs, to both educate the public more about what it is that MPs do, and to explicitly signal the range of characteristics, skills, dispositions, and experiences relevant to the job of being an MP" "Engage in various parliamentary and other activities to enhance the supply of, and demand for, diverse parliamentary candidates." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"We believe there is a role for the Education and Engagement Team, the two Communications teams, and the Parliamentary Digital Service in demonstrating visibly that people from all backgrounds are welcome, including:... b. Continuing existing efforts to make the parliamentary website more accessible and inclusive; and c. Ensuring outreach and social media activity captures the work of parliamentarians in all their diversity." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018); "Develop a gender communications strategy that identifies target audiences, key messages, methods and timeframes" "Showcase and publicize the gender equality activities and outcomes in the media, or through the parliament's own communication channels, including its website." "... promote women parliamentarians as role models through parliament's communications tools in the media" (Plan of Action 2017)

<sup>41</sup> "We believe there is a role for the Education and Engagement Team, the two Communications teams, and the Parliamentary Digital Service in demonstrating visibly that people from all backgrounds are welcome, including: a. Greater engagement with organisations supporting the increased diversity and inclusivity of Parliament;" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>42</sup> "Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of women's representation in parliament" (Plan of Action 2017).

<sup>43</sup> "Support mentorship programmes" (Plan of Action 2017).

<sup>44</sup> "Encouraging the inclusion of men in parliamentary events pertaining to the recognition of gender-related issues, such as International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women." (Plan of Action 2017)

engagement and connection with organisations working on this issue could be achieved, particularly in the lead up to the centenary of the 1928 Equal Franchise Act.

## Women in committees and leadership positions

	Sources for the recommendations								Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports				International Best Practice						
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)			
Diversity in Leadership and Decision-making Bodies		X	X				X		X	X	
Diversity in Select Committees		X	X			X	X		X		X

## Diversity in Parliamentary Leadership Roles and Decision-Making Bodies

**Rating: Recommendations partially met**

### Background

While women are underrepresented in the membership of the House of Commons, it is important that women are not further underrepresented within leadership roles and decision-making bodies within the House. Both key UK reports and international best practice point to the importance of having gender equality in main institutional leadership positions and recommend formal rule changes to guarantee gender diversity.

Two reports point directly at parliamentary bodies needing to be more diverse. *The Good Parliament* suggested that the House of Commons Commission – which is responsible for the administration and services of the House of Commons – should be more gender balanced. There are currently more women MPs than men MPs in this committee, but this reflects party leadership positions and is not guaranteed in the future; a new formal rule would institutionalise gender equality.<sup>45</sup> The *Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit* in 2018 suggested the Panel of Chairs – MPs chosen by the Speaker to chair Public Bill committees and general committees in the House of Commons – should be more diverse. The Panel of Chairs now has seventeen women members out of 46 members, meaning it is 36 percent women, closely replicating the percentage of women MPs, but again this is liable to change as it is not subject to a formal rule.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> House of Commons Commission <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/348/house-of-commons-commission/membership/> “To The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion: Sponsor a measure to gender balance MP membership of the House of Commons Commission” (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>46</sup> Panel of Chairs <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/11/panel-of-chairs/membership/>

“It would be straightforward for the Panel of Chairs to be made more diverse over time, as decisions about membership lie within the gift of the Speaker” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018).



The role of Speaker is the only one with a specific rule whereby it is required that at least one woman and one man should be elected across the four posts of speaker and deputy speakers.<sup>47</sup> This is a widely accepted practice and demonstrates that formal rule changes guaranteeing parity have a history and respected tradition within the House of Commons.

### Outstanding Recommendations

- Procedure Committee, Liaison Committee and the Speaker: Identify and pilot mechanisms to guarantee gender diversity in leadership positions, through e.g. rotating positions of parliamentary leadership between women and men over a period of time, establishing dual leadership for parliamentary structures with one woman and one man appointed, or requiring either equality or a minimum level of women's participation, or else preferentially recruiting women when a man and woman are equally qualified until equality is reached.<sup>48</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action

The House of Commons Commission and Panel of Chairs are now more diverse than at the time of earlier reports. However, there is concern that parliamentary leadership body could easily revert to being unrepresentative, as such, new formal rules should be put in place to institutionalize parity in parliamentary governing bodies and leadership positions in the future. International best practice points to different ways in which this might be achieved.

## Diversity in Select Committee Membership

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Reports have long called for greater diversity in the membership and witnesses of select committees. This is crucial to ensure that our laws and governance reflect the intersecting diversity of our population.

In relation to committee membership, the selection of members for committees reflects party decisions - informed by proportional representation requirements across parties. Currently women are only a third of members of select committees, broadly in line with the number of women in Parliament. The underrepresentation of women is much higher in specific committees, such as the Foreign Affairs Committee which currently has one women member, and the Business and Trade Committee which has only two women members. As such women are systematically under-represented in policy making and that will continue to shape the way legislation is formed until this under-representation is rectified.

There has been some progress made in relation to the diversity of committee witnesses. The Liaison Select Committee in 2018 outlined that 'a panel of three or more witnesses should normally include at least one woman' and stated that they intend for 'at least 40% of discretionary witnesses' to be female.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately this standard is not being met by all committees.<sup>50</sup> Remote

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<sup>47</sup> Communications with Cultural Transformation

<sup>48</sup> "Rotate positions of parliamentary leadership between men and women over a period of time." "Introduce dual leadership for parliamentary structures, where possible, through the appointment of a man and a woman." "Establish a committee or entrust an existing one with the task of examining the possible implementation of affirmative action policies that give preference to women over men for parliamentary positions in cases where qualifications are equal and where women are inadequately represented at leadership levels." (Plan of Action 2017)

"Are there formal rules to ensure gender balance on these governing body/bodies?" "Are there any formal rules requiring either (a) equality or (b) a minimum level of women's participation as ... and other parliamentary leadership positions?" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020)

"The adoption of shared leadership, either by establishing co-leadership positions, or rotating the positions between men and women;" "Internal rule changes to increase the number of women appointed to parliamentary leadership positions (including committee chairs and leadership positions in the bureau or board);" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021);

"Consider a formalised rule for balanced gender representation on decision-making bodies within the institution." (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022).

<sup>49</sup> Liaison Committee (2018) Witness gender diversity: next steps for select committees

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/103/liaison-committee-commons/news/105357/witness-gender-diversity-next-steps-for-select-committees/>

<sup>50</sup> House of Commons (2022) Sessional Returns: Session 2021-22 (11 May 2021-28 April 2022)

[https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/09ad47092d1b4552b9b94155fa8801f7/sessional\\_return\\_final.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/09ad47092d1b4552b9b94155fa8801f7/sessional_return_final.pdf)

participation is allowed for witnesses (although not committee members) with agreement from the committee.<sup>51</sup> Evidence suggests this is having an impact on witness diversity (albeit not enough). In 2021–22, 39 percent of witnesses were women, an improvement on previous years.<sup>52</sup>

## Outstanding Recommendations

- Commons Liaison Committee with political parties: Prohibit single sex/gender select committees, encourage parties to be mindful of representativeness in election of members to committees and consider adopting formal rules requiring equality or a minimum level of women Members' participation on committees.<sup>53</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Continue to encourage gender diversity among select committee witness, including through changing rules to ensure this is the case, and/or setting targets.<sup>54</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Consider introducing sex/gender quotas or alternative special measures for the election of committee chairs.<sup>55</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Consider ways in which committees might meet virtually or in a hybrid format.<sup>56</sup>

## Discussion and Recommended Action

While considerable progress has been made in this area, the Commons Liaison and Procedure Committees should consider whether more formal requirements for gender balance in membership, chairs and witnesses should be put in place. Such

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<sup>51</sup> UK Parliament, 'Witnesses and oral evidence', MPs' Guide to Procedure, <https://guidetoprocedure.parliament.uk/articles/CnhtfvB1/witnesses-and-oral-evidence#:~:text=Witnesses%20can%20participate%20remotely%20in,the%20agreement%20of%20the%20Committee.>

<sup>52</sup> House of Commons (2022) Sessional Returns (11 May 2021–28 April 2022); House of Commons Library (2020) House of Commons trends: Women on select committees <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/house-of-commons-trends-women-on-select-committees/>

<sup>53</sup> "To Procedure Committee: Prohibit single-sex/gender select committees, and encourage political parties to be mindful of wider representativeness in the election of members to committees." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"In the Commons, there does not appear to be a barrier to women joining select committees (apart from that of time). Political parties, which organise the informal mechanisms by which committee membership is decided in practice, should routinely assure themselves that women continue to have the same opportunities to serve on committees as men, according to their interest and expertise." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

"Encourage the proportional and equitable distribution of women parliamentarians across all committees, not just those relating to women, children, gender, families, health and education." (Plan of Action 2017);

"Are there any formal rules requiring either (a) equality or (b) a minimum level of women's participation as ... committee members ...?" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

"[Adopt] Internal rule changes to guarantee a proportional and equitable distribution of women parliamentarians across all committees—not just those relating to social issues...;" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>54</sup> "A rule change should be sought whereby any select committee witness panel of three or more must be sex/gender diverse if, by the end of the 2015 parliament, select committees are not reaching a 40 percent sex/gender threshold amongst witnesses." "Require the House Service to provide comprehensive and systematic diversity data in respect of select committees witnesses at the end of each session, and establish annual rolling targets for witness representativeness." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"Select committees should make every possible effort to ensure that female witnesses and those from other diverse groups are not prevented from contributing to their inquiries, either by being overlooked in favour of the "usual suspects" or by being put off from putting themselves forward. We understand that the Lords Liaison Committee is expected to consider proposals on how Lords committees might monitor this more routinely: we support this." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>55</sup> "To The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion: Introduce sex/gender quotas for the election of select committee chairs prior to the 2025 general election if, by 2024, the percentage of women chairs is less than 40 percent" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"Are there any formal rules requiring either (a) equality or (b) a minimum level of women's participation as committee chairs ...?" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

"[Adopt] Internal rule changes to increase the number of women appointed to parliamentary leadership positions (including committee chairs ...)" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>56</sup> "To Liaison Committee: Recommend that individual members of Select Committees may participate remotely and press the Leader of the House to so act; Recommend that Select Committees (under its purview) may meet fully virtually, by agreement of the Committee. Select Committees should be supported in the continuation of the more extensive remote participation of witnesses practised during Covid-19." "Research should be undertaken either (a) in-house or (b) through the commissioning of independent research, to assess the relative effectiveness of virtual, hybrid and in-person Select Committees, including the effect on witness diversity, Committee cohesion, committee efficiency, and scrutiny and impact." (The Remotely Representative House 2021);

"Continue, or reinstate, the ability of witnesses to appear virtually in front of Committees at the discretion of the Chair or Convenor of the Committee" "Continue, or reinstate, the ability of Members to participate virtually in Committees at the discretion of the Chair or Convenor of the Committee" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

considerations should also consider the representation of people from a diverse and intersecting range of backgrounds including disability and ethnicity.

# Infrastructure

When diverse candidates have been successfully elected to the House of Commons, it is crucial that the infrastructure of the House enables them to participate fully and accommodating their needs and responsibilities. The House of Commons has been slow to adapt to the needs of a diverse membership, but there have been important changes made.

For example, proxy voting and additional funds to cover constituency work, have recently been granted to new parents. Enabling and supporting MPs who are mothers is important as historically, the “mother of parliaments” has largely been a parliament absent of mothers.<sup>57</sup> While changes have been put in place to better support these needs, there is still a long way to go. In order to create real momentum for change, a new Advisory Group needs to be created to oversee the diversity sensitive parliament agenda.

Parliamentary workloads and schedules make the life of an MP difficult to balance with other care responsibilities. Numerous potential solutions have been recommended in the key reports which form the basis of this audit. These range from greater predictability to the introduction of remote measures and grouped voting times. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic provided the House of Commons with the impetus to trial many of the strategies suggested, however all Covid-19 measures have been rolled back without a review.

## Key Recommendations

1. Create a new Speaker’s Advisory Group to push forward the diversity sensitive parliament agenda.
2. Conduct regular audit of gender-sensitivity of Parliament to include an assessment of adequacy of child-friendly provisions.
3. Review sitting days and hours.
4. Launch a review into voting practices in the House of Commons.
5. Initiate an inquiry into the online measures introduced during Covid-19 and highlight measures which should be continued to support greater inclusivity and diversity.
6. Develop a parliamentary policy for children and families, and an information tool for parents working in Parliament.

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<sup>57</sup> Campbell, R. and Childs, S. (2014) ‘Parents in Parliament: ‘Where’s Mum?’’, *The Political Quarterly*, vol 85 (4).  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264501243\\_Parents\\_in\\_Parliament\\_Where's\\_Mum](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264501243_Parents_in_Parliament_Where's_Mum)

## Infrastructure for gender-sensitive Parliament

	Sources for the recommendations									Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice						
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)			
New Advisory Group on Gender-Sensitive Parliaments		X			X	X		X		X		
Audit and surveys of Parliament	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	
Improve Data Collection and Publication		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	
Gender Sensitive Restoration and Renewal		X	X	X	X					X		

### New Advisory Group on Gender Sensitive Parliaments

**Rating: Recommendations not met**

#### Background

The Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion, flagged for its importance in *The Good Parliament*, and which played a pivotal role in pushing for many of the changes that have been seen in the past decade, no longer exists.<sup>58</sup> International best practice and the Fawcett Society's report point to the importance of having a single body to push forward the gender sensitive parliaments agenda. There is currently important work being done by several bodies, such as the Cultural Transformation Team and the House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team as well as the select committees. However, there is little oversight or accountability for the work which is being done. A body with a broader remit and held to a higher level of accountability is required.

<sup>58</sup> Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion – Decisions. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/other-committees/CRG-Decisions.pdf>

## Outstanding Recommendations

- Speaker: Establish a new Advisory Group to lead on the gender sensitive parliaments agenda.<sup>59</sup>

## Discussion and Recommended Action

The creation of a separate body to push forward the diversity sensitive parliaments agenda is recommended by international best practice.

The mandate for pushing forward reforms must be given to a single entity with authority and legitimacy. This body might be an Advisory Group to the Speaker. It should be an elected body, with transparency and accountability in all its actions. It should include representatives from different political parties, and a mix of men and women of different ages and experience.<sup>60</sup>

## Audit and surveys of Parliament

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Gender sensitivity audits have been conducted by Parliament since the *Good Parliament* report, in the form of the 2018 Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit and the Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-22 report. However, both of these reports pointed out that further action, and further monitoring of progress are still needed. International best practice recommend that full audits need to be conducted regularly as set out in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Kigali Declaration in 2022.<sup>61</sup>

The Members' Services Team conducts regular surveys of members, but there should be a commitment to regularly conduct surveys to assess views and experience of provision around childcare, facilities, access and working practices.

## Outstanding Recommendations

- New Advisory Group: Conduct regular intersectional gender sensitivity audits and publish the results of the audit alongside action plans towards progress.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> "A Speaker's reference group on gender equality composed of men and women parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, which reports to the Speaker directly and sets the parliament's gender equality direction and agenda;" "Ensure that there is a formal mechanism by which the body that is tasked with gender mainstreaming – be it an informal women's caucus or a dedicated parliamentary committee – can report on its studies and examination of legislation to the key political organs of the parliament. Where reports have not been presented, reasons should be given" (Plan of Action 2017); "Establish a new Reference Group to lead on the Diversity Sensitive Parliaments agenda." (The Remotely Representative House 2021); "Ensure that there is a formal body tasked with gender-sensitive oversight that has parliamentary legitimacy and is sufficiently resourced to report on its examination of legislation to the key political organs of the parliament;" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021); "Create a new body to drive diversity and inclusivity reforms in the House of Commons. This body should have responsibility to audit the recommendations made to date from various reports, including *The Good Parliament* and the UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit. Findings from this audit should henceforth form the basis of a public annual update to be provided by this body about the progress of recommendations from these reports" (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>60</sup> Childs, S. and Smith J, Written evidence submitted by Professor Sarah Childs and Dr Jessica C. Smith [GSP0012] <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/25329/html/>

<sup>61</sup> 145<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly (2022) Kigali Declaration <file:///C:/Users/k2040374/Downloads/Kigali%20Declaration-e.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> "The House Administrations may wish to consider what data might be collected to allow future audits to take account of the experiences of individuals of other gender identities and greater consideration of intersectionality in discussing people's experiences in Parliament" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018); "As a first step the House of Commons Commission conduct a swift review of the implementation of recommendations in *The Good Parliament* report and the UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018, in line with best practice recommended by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliaments Association. We recommend this review be published within six months, together with the results of the Member Services Team's survey of MPs that we have recommended in this Report. We further recommend the Commission report annually to [the Women and Equalities Committee] on progress in any outstanding areas. Where necessary, we will hold annual oral evidence sessions to scrutinise progress and make further recommendations." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022); "Use the IPU's gender-sensitive self-assessment toolkit... The method involves answering questions about the way gender equality is incorporated into the culture and work of the parliament." "Use own internal structures to evaluate the level of gender sensitivity, such as an audit, or other business review or committee. In this case, external stakeholders such as civil society groups, national women's machineries and research institutes could be invited to share their opinions on the state of gender sensitivity with the committee, and draw up recommendations for change. The committee would then present its own conclusions and recommendations to the plenary or parliamentary leadership for discussion and further action." "Conduct a gender assessment of the facilities provided to all parliamentarians" "Ensure that the language used in all official documents, including standing orders, is gender-sensitive (e.g. does not refer to members using the

- New Advisory Group and Members Services: Conduct regular surveys on MPs experiences and views of childcare, facilities, access and working practices.<sup>63</sup>

## Discussion and Recommended Action

For the auditing process to be effective, it needs to be an ongoing process, with direct oversight by one body which has authority and legitimacy. Surveys of members should also be conducted regularly to ensure that progress is being made and to continuously keep in touch with the views of members and users of provisions.

## Increase Collection and Publication of Sex-disaggregated and Intersectional Data

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Collecting and publishing data on diversity will form the foundation for addressing underrepresentation. Gender pay gap data and information on the gender of witnesses to select committees is now published and available online.<sup>64</sup>

The House of Commons Library regularly publishes research on gender and political participation.<sup>65</sup> However, recommendations point to a much greater degree of data gathering and publication that is necessary as a preliminary step in being able to properly diagnose and remedy gender (and intersecting) inequalities. This is crucial for the new Advisory Group to be able to fulfil its role.

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masculine pronoun “he” and uses chairperson or chair rather than chairman).” “Ensure that the parliament’s budget is gender-sensitive and that accountability measures are in place to monitor progress.” (Plan of Action 2017);

“Has your parliament undertaken consultations on gender equality/gender sensitive parliaments in the last 3 years? Was this with (a) parliamentarians (b) parliamentarians’ staff; or, (c) parliamentary staff?” “Has your parliament undertaken a ‘gender sensitive review’ of any of the following? Electoral law; Standing orders; Codes of conduct; Parliamentary calendar and sitting hours; Existing gender equality legislation; The sex breakdown of committee ‘witnesses’ and committee external experts; Parliamentary facilities (e.g. toilet capacity, artwork, social spaces, food and other amenities, e.g. chemists); Mentoring schemes for Parliamentarians and staff; Dress codes; Practices etc...; Parliamentarians’ pay and expenses schemes; Job shares for Parliamentarians; Provision for parliamentarians childcare costs; Maternity, paternity leave, parental leave and caring leave; Proxy voting, surrogate parliaments or other provision to cover parliamentarians’ work in parliament and in the constituency; Office allocation; The needs of parliamentarians and staff who are parents: including: The parliamentary gender pay gap for parliamentarians/parliamentary staff/ parliamentarians’ staff; Sexism, sexual harassment and gendered bullying and violence against women in politics (VAW-P); Other parliaments GSP best practice” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020)

“Use established evaluation guides to run gender-sensitive self-assessments or audits; implement any resulting recommendations for change; and publish the assessment or audit report to promote interparliamentary lesson learning.” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021);

“Have a clear and coordinated process for regularly reviewing parliamentary infrastructure for gender sensitivity (procedural, process and physical)” (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022);

<sup>63</sup> “We recommend the House of Commons Member Services Team conduct a survey of MPs, to gather and understand their personal experiences and views about current working practices, facilities and provision, and the need for further reform in the interests of gender and wider diversity sensitivity. The survey should gather MPs’ views on: • the adequacy of childcare provision at different times of the day and evening; • the adequacy of facilities including toilets and spaces for baby-changing, breast-feeding and expressing milk; • access rules, including the rules on MPs’ babies in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall; • the extent to which the facilities of the House of Commons meet the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions; and • the House’s working practices and their effects on participation in House of Commons proceedings by parents, carers, disabled people and those with longterm health conditions.

The results should be disaggregated by sex and other protected characteristics, so far as is consistent with protecting the anonymity of respondents. We recommend this survey be completed within three months of publication of this Report. The results should be fed into the House of Commons Commission’s gender sensitivity and diversity action plan, which we recommend at the end of this Report.” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>64</sup> “Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: ... The gender pay gap amongst parliamentarians; The gender pay gap amongst parliamentary staff” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020)

House of Commons (2022) House of Commons pay gap report <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/hoc-pay-gap-reporting-2022.pdf>

House of Commons (2022) Sessional Returns: Session 2021-22 (11 May 2021-28 April 2022)

<sup>65</sup> Uberoi, E. and Mansfield Z. (2023) ‘Women in politics and public life’, House of Commons Library.

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN01250/SN01250.pdf>

Uberoi, E. (2020) ‘MPs in Parliament: Breakdown of activities by gender and party’, House of Commons Library

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/mps-in-parliament-breakdown-of-activities-by-gender-and-party/>



## Outstanding Recommendations

- ICGS: Publish sex-disaggregated data on harassment, bullying and sexual misconduct.<sup>66</sup>
- House of Commons Commission: Commit to regularly collecting and publishing diversity data on all MPs and those in leadership positions.<sup>67</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Collect and publish diversity data on committee membership, chairs, witnesses, special advisors, travel and participation - this is currently only done by gender and for witnesses, more intersectional data on disabilities, ethnicity or other protected characteristics could be included;<sup>68</sup>
- House of Commons Library: Collect and publish data on members speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities disaggregated by sex and other major social characteristics.<sup>69</sup>
- Procedure Committee: Monitor, collect and publish data on use of hybrid technologies and alternative voting.<sup>70</sup>
- Members' Services Team and Commons Liaison Committee: Collect and publish disaggregated data on Members' uptake of training and participation in travel.<sup>71</sup>
- Speaker: Collect and consider publishing information on the percentage of women amongst all media passholders.<sup>72</sup>
- House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team: Collect and publish data on staff, staff in leadership positions, participation in delegation travel and uptake of training.<sup>73</sup>
- House of Commons Library and new Advisory Group: Publish and make accessible the diversity data collected by the ICGS, House of Commons Commission, Commons Liaison Committee, Speaker, Procedure Committee,

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<sup>66</sup> "We are aware that statistics about bullying and harassment of staff of the House of Commons or House of Lords are published from time to time in response to Freedom of Information requests, but, so far as we know, these statistics have not been broken down by gender. We ask the House Administrations to consider whether this might be possible in future, given that this information will presumably be available to those raising formal complaints through the new channels open to staff of both Houses." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>67</sup> "We consider that it would be appropriate for a parliamentary body to monitor the gender breakdown of MPs and peers and those in leadership positions, and to publish the results. We recommend that the Women and Equalities Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights should consider exercising their existing power to meet jointly to carry out this task on an annual basis." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

"Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: ... Parliamentarians diversity data (gender, ethnicity, education, profession, motherhood, fatherhood, age, disability, sexuality)" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020)

"Data is collected and publicly published on women in leadership positions in the institution" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022);

<sup>68</sup> "To the Liaison Committee: Require the House Service to provide comprehensive and systematic diversity data in respect of select committees witnesses at the end of each session, and establish annual rolling targets for witness representativeness." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"Collect and publicly publish sex disaggregated data on women's participation in the key areas of parliamentary life including (i) Committee membership" "Collect and publicly publish sex disaggregated data on witnesses coming before Committees" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>69</sup> "The Speaker's Office should systematically and comprehensively monitor and report the speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities by MPs' sex/gender and other major social characteristics" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"The number of questions, speeches and interventions in both Houses should be measured by gender using data from the Official Report, in order to analyse whether members from one gender are disproportionately represented. In the light of the findings, consideration should then be given to possible steps that might be taken to ensure that any barriers to intervening are addressed, including the method by which parliamentarians indicate they want to speak" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018) ;

"To the Speaker: Systematically and comprehensively monitor and report the speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities by MPs' sex/gender and other major social characteristics - and, where hybridity continues by physical and remote participation." (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

<sup>70</sup> "To the Speaker: Systematically and comprehensively monitor and report the speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities by MPs' sex/gender and other major social characteristics - and, where hybridity continues by physical and remote participation." (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

"Monitor participation in debates by virtual and physical presence by key demographics and geographical location of members" "Monitor the use of proxy and remote voting systems by key demographics and geographical location of members" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>71</sup> "Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: ... Parliamentarians participation in delegation travel... Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff take up of gender/equalities training" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

"Collect and publicly publish sex disaggregated data on women's participation in the key areas of parliamentary life including ... Participation in delegation travel" "Monitor and publicly publish aggregate data on the take up of voluntary training" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>72</sup> "Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: ... The percentage of women journalists amongst media personnel given privileged access to the parliament (sometimes called lobby journalists)" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

<sup>73</sup> "Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: ... Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff take up of gender/equalities training; Parliamentary staff (clerks, officials, other workers), in leadership positions; Parliamentary staff participation in parliamentary delegation travel," (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

"Collect and publicly publish sex disaggregated data on parliamentary staff (clerks, officials, other workers) in leadership positions" (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)



Members' Services Team, and House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and any other body routinely gathering diversity data.<sup>74</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action

The collection and publication of sex-disaggregated and intersectional data needs to be the foundation for further reforms of the House of Commons. Importantly this need must be balanced with the protection of anonymity – which might mean a compromise in terms of the granularity of the data published. The recommendations above are from the key reports, but international best practice sets out an even wider scope which should be incorporated into future data gathering efforts.

The new Advisory Group together with the House of Commons Library might coordinate collection and publication and create a 'diversity dashboard' or similar to be a single point of data access. The creation of this hub would, of course, require resources.

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<sup>74</sup> "Does your parliament (1) collect and (2) publish (makes publicly available), sex/gender disaggregated data regarding: Parliamentary candidate diversity data (gender, ethnicity, education, profession, motherhood, fatherhood, age, disability, sexuality); Parliamentarians diversity data (gender, ethnicity, education, profession, motherhood, fatherhood, age, disability, sexuality); Parliamentarians participation in plenary debates; Parliamentarians participation in formal 'question times'; Parliamentarians participation in committee proceedings; Parliamentarians participation in delegation travel; Parliamentarians in leadership positions in the Parliament; Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff take up of gender/equalities training; Parliamentary staff (clerks, officials, other workers), in leadership positions; Parliamentary staff participation in parliamentary delegation travel; Witnesses coming before committees; External 'specialist advisers' attached to committees; The gender pay gap amongst parliamentarians; The gender pay gap amongst parliamentary staff; The percentage of women journalists amongst media personnel given privileged access to the parliament (sometimes called lobby journalists)" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

## Gender Sensitive Restoration and Renewal

**Rating: Recommendations not met**

### Background

Numerous reports have emphasised the importance of gender sensitivity being incorporated into the restoration and renewal process.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the restoration and renewal process has gone through considerable change. The Restoration and Renewal Client Board and Delivery Authority were established in late 2022 after agreement in the Commons and Lords to introduce a new governance structure underpinning the process.<sup>76</sup> The new structure has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy underpinning the Restoration and Renewal process and is required to attend to matters relating to accessibility and sustainable development. The full extent of the recommendations have not been incorporated as yet, because the process has been significantly delayed.

### Outstanding Recommendations

- Restoration and Renewal Client Board: Establish an independent advisory panel of experts on gender and diversity sensitivity to advise the restoration and renewal process.<sup>77</sup>
- Restoration and Renewal Client Board: Request an annual audit of the contribution of the Restoration and Renewal process to gender diverse House of Commons.<sup>78</sup>
- Restoration and Renewal: Use process as a vehicle for trials for better inclusivity.<sup>79</sup>

### Discussion and Recommended Action: Embed Gender Awareness into Restoration and Renewal Process

Restoration and Renewal presents an important opportunity for Parliament to prepare for the future while also pro-actively implementing the reforms needed to ensure an inclusive and diverse House. It is crucial that the Restoration and Renewal process has gender sensitivity and inclusivity at its heart. In addition to the current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy underpinning the Restoration and Renewal process, the creation of a Restoration and Renewal Diversity Group alongside an annual audit should help to embed diversity awareness.

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<sup>75</sup> “In the context of the expected temporary decant from the Palace of Westminster for Restoration and Renewal: Trial sittings of the House based around ‘normal business hours’” “In the context of the expected temporary decant from the Palace of Westminster for Restoration and Renewal: Trial opportunities for remote voting by MPs physically present on the Parliamentary Estate.” (The Good Parliament 2016);

“We noted that the Restoration & Renewal programme is an opportunity to continue progress in increasing the inclusivity of parliamentary artwork.” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018); Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022;

“To Restoration and Renewal (R&R) Body: During R&R, provide remote voting for all Members and centre hybrid and remote participation in all planning for a restored House of Commons.” (The Remotely Representative House 2021);

“We further recommend that the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body consider the provision of accessible car parking spaces as part of its Outline Business Base for Restoration and Renewal.” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>76</sup> Houses of Parliament Restoration & Renewal website <https://restorationandrenewal.uk/about-us> ; Communications with Restoration and Renewal Client Team (April-May 2023)

<sup>77</sup> “We recommend the Sponsor Body appoint an independent advisory panel of experts on gender and diversity sensitivity to advise on building design and facilities in the Outline Business Case for any temporary decant location and the restored and renewed Palace of Westminster. This panel should include specific expertise to support the Sponsor Body to comply with its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 on sex and other protected characteristics.” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>78</sup> “We also recommend that the Sponsor Body conduct and publish annual audits of its contribution to a gender sensitive House of Commons, drawing on the recommendations in The Good Parliament report and regular consultation with the parliamentary community, so that there can be transparent scrutiny by the public and this Committee. Its annual audit should include the diversity of the Sponsor Body itself, including its parliamentary membership.” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>79</sup> “In the context of the expected temporary decant from the Palace of Westminster for Restoration and Renewal: Trial sittings of the House based around ‘normal business hours’” “In the context of the expected temporary decant from the Palace of Westminster for Restoration and Renewal: Trial opportunities for remote voting by MPs physically present on the Parliamentary Estate.” (The Good Parliament 2016);

“We noted that the Restoration & Renewal programme is an opportunity to continue progress in increasing the inclusivity of parliamentary artwork.” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018); Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022;

“To Restoration and Renewal (R&R) Body: During R&R, provide remote voting for all Members and centre hybrid and remote participation in all planning for a restored House of Commons.” (The Remotely Representative House 2021);

“We further recommend that the Parliamentary Works Sponsor Body consider the provision of accessible car parking spaces as part of its Outline Business Base for Restoration and Renewal.” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

## Predictability, flexibility, time and work

	Sources for the recommendations										Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice					Recommendations partially met
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	The Remotely Representative House (2021) <sup>80</sup>	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)	Recommendations not met
Sitting Hours and the Parliamentary Calendar	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X
Rethinking Voting	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X
A Hybrid House		X		X	X	X			X	X	X
Addressing Workloads	X		X			X					X
Equitable Travel			X				X		X		X

### Sitting Hours and the Parliamentary Calendar

Rating: Recommendations not met

<sup>80</sup> This is included as a key point of reference in this section as it focuses on the use of remote technology in parliament.

## Background

Parliament does not work to normal ‘business hours’. In recent decades, sitting hours have improved considerably. The House usually only regularly sits past 10pm on Mondays.<sup>81</sup> However, sitting hours and a lack of predictability continue to negatively impact the way MPs with caring responsibilities view being an MP.<sup>82</sup> There is considerable scope for greater predictability and for the introduction of ‘core hours’ in the middle of the day. Suggestions for reforms have been central to the recommendations made in previous reports.

Due to the working hours being unsociable and MPs spending much of their time away from home, MPs struggle to access services for their health and wellbeing. The Parliamentary Health and Wellbeing service provides an onsite GP, and the shop now stocks sanitary items, toothpaste and deodorant. MPs should be surveyed to ensure that sufficient facilities are provided.

Due to the number of individual recommendations, they have been synthesised into two broader calls for review and reform and an additional recommendation to ensure that the facilities on offer are able to support the needs of parliamentarians who do work unsociable hours.

## Outstanding recommendations

- Procedure Committee: Review sitting days and hours.<sup>83</sup>
- Leader of the House with the Government: Improve the predictability of the Parliamentary calendar and scheduling of business.<sup>84</sup>
- Administration Committee: Assess the sufficiency of facilities to support unsociable hours, for health and wellbeing as well as childcare provision, through a survey of members and address the results.<sup>85</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

MPs’ expanding workloads, alongside the institutional limitations of how Parliament currently works, are creating barriers to participation for those with caring responsibilities. A review of sitting hours, including mechanisms to facilitate greater predictability, to support MPs with caring responsibilities and those who commute long distances should be considered by the Procedure Committee. This is critical in making the job of an MP more accessible.

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<sup>81</sup> Politowski, B. (2015) ‘House of Commons: Hours Sat and Late Sitings’ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn02226/>

Kelly, R. (2015) ‘Sitting hours’, *House of Commons Library*. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06380/SN06380.pdf>  
House of Commons (2022) Sessional Returns: Session 2021-22 (11 May 2021-28 April 2022)

<sup>82</sup> A House for Everyone 2023

<sup>83</sup> “Abolish party conference recess and sitting Fridays” “Trial sittings of the House based around ‘normal business hours’” (The Good Parliament);

“A review should be undertaken in each House to consider how efficient it is at carrying out its business and assess options for reform such as: ... c. Compressing the sitting week into fewer days” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

“Rearrange their sitting hours (e.g. by establishing compressed sitting weeks, creating schedules that start early, avoiding late voting, and aligning sitting times with the school calendar) so that parliamentarians can return to their electorates and spend more time with their families.” (Plan of Action 2017)

“Has your parliament undertaken a ‘gender sensitive review’ of any of the following? ... Parliamentary calendar and sitting hours” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

“As identified in *The Good Parliament*, conduct an inquiry examining the introduction of core business hours.” (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>84</sup> “Improve the predictability of the Parliamentary calendar – MPs should know further in advance whipping requirements and timetable of the business of the House, so they can plan their time and prepare more effectively” (Improving Parliament 2014);

“Set the recess dates for each parliamentary session, at least one session in advance” “Abolish party conference recess and sitting Fridays” “Introduce greater predictability in the scheduling of House Business” (The Good Parliament);

“A review should be undertaken in each House to consider how efficient it is at carrying out its business and assess options for reform such as: a. More advance notice of the parliamentary calendar, including setting expected sitting days up to a year in advance; b. More predictability in, and advance notice of, the scheduling of business, including a set time for voting (although the benefits of the current system were noted regarding the potential for MPs to cast their vote in response to arguments made during the debate) and a time set aside for “important questions”; ... d. More closely aligning recess dates and school holidays, to increase the ability of members from all parts of the United Kingdom to spend time with their families;” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

“Continue publishing ‘call lists’ and advanced notice and timing of Urgent Questions and Statements” (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

“Has your parliament undertaken a ‘gender sensitive review’ of any of the following? ... Parliamentary calendar and sitting hours” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

<sup>85</sup> “[Parliament should provide] More facilities that support the needs of parliamentarians that stem from unsociable hours.” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

Certain reforms put in place during Covid-19, such as giving advanced notice of call-lists – the list of Members selected to speak in Westminster Hall debates, were welcomed by many MPs, however these have been rolled back without a review of their impact on diversity and inclusion.<sup>86</sup> This is a major missed opportunity to understand whether a more flexible workplace for those who need it can be reconciled with the existing mechanisms of Parliament. A review of Covid-19 measures is recommended below.

## Rethinking voting

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

There have long been calls to reform voting procedures. Many of the proposed reforms stem from a desire to facilitate greater predictability for MPs and improve efficiency not only in the time it takes to vote but the disruption this causes to the scrutiny of Government as committees and other parliamentary activities are routinely and regularly interrupted. These reforms would enable MPs to better balance their various roles and responsibilities while also making the job of an MP more accessible to people from different backgrounds. To this effect, reports have called for a variety of reforms.

While there are outstanding recommendations, there has been significant progress. Proxy voting has now been introduced for MPs with new born or newly adopted children. The introduction of proxy voting marked a significant step forward for the inclusion and diversity agenda. By ensuring that another MP is casting an MPs' vote enables them to be absent from Westminster but still have their vote formally recorded.<sup>87</sup> But of course, it is more than just parents of young children who stand to benefit from proxy voting, and that is why the recent recommendation to extend proxy voting to those with serious long-term illness or injury is so important.<sup>88</sup> To keep in line with international best practice, the scheme should be extended further, as indicated below.

#### Outstanding Recommendations

- Procedure Committee: Launch a review into voting practices in the House of Commons, including reviewing the establishment of a 'division time', where multiple votes could be taken together; reintroducing remote voting, and extending the current proxy voting scheme for parents to 12 months and to include those who are breastfeeding and with other caring responsibilities.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Communications with House of Commons Procedure Committee (April-May 2023)

Letter from the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, The Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP to Caroline Nokes MP, Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/33815/documents/184649/default/>

<sup>87</sup> Proxy voting scheme (2023) [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/proxyvoting/proxyvotingscheme\\_rev\\_Aug\\_2023.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-03/proxyvoting/proxyvotingscheme_rev_Aug_2023.pdf)

<sup>88</sup> House of Commons Procedure Committee (2023) Proxy voting: Review of illness and injury pilot

<sup>89</sup> "Review the establishment of a 'Division Time', whereby multiple votes could be taken together at a particular point of the parliamentary sitting" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"As identified in *The Good Parliament*, conduct an inquiry examining the introduction of a 'division hour'" (A House for Everyone 2023)

"(As part of *Restoration and Renewal*) Trial opportunities for remote voting by MPs physically present on the *Parliamentary Estate*"; "Permit MPs to be counted at the 'door' of the division lobbies when accompanied by their children." (The Good Parliament 2016);

"As part of its post-pandemic review of proxy voting, reconsider the introduction of remote voting for all qualifying Members (including those who may become entitled to a proxy in the future)." "Until all Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, press the Leader of the House to act on their recommendation to reintroduce remote voting for all members, combining both on-estate and off-estate remote voting". (The Remotely Representative House 2021);

"Supporting all parliamentarians with caring responsibilities (be they newborns, school-aged children, elderly or special-needs dependents) by offering them alternatives to chamber duty and voting, such as paid parental leave and carer's leave, flexible working arrangements (including remote voting), a proxy vote or vote pairing;" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

"Investigate the expansion of different voting methods, through: – launching an inquiry into the piloting of online voting." (A House for Everyone 2023)

"Extend the scope of the proxy voting scheme to extend to 12 months" (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

"Give parliamentarians who are still breastfeeding the opportunity to use a proxy vote or vote pairing so that they need not attend the sitting." (Plan of Action 2017)

"Supporting all parliamentarians with caring responsibilities (be they newborns, school-aged children, elderly or special-needs dependents) by offering them alternatives to chamber duty and voting, such as ... flexible working arrangements (including remote voting), a proxy vote or vote pairing;" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

- Leader of the House: Move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure Committee review of voting practices.

## Discussion and recommended action

A review into voting practices in the House of Commons is much needed. With Covid-19 having tested the feasibility of many innovations – and demonstrating their effectiveness and reliability, and with proxy-voting being extended, it is time to review the potential benefits of introducing more permanent changes to make the job of an MP more accessible and flexible, whether through the introduction of ‘division times’ – periods when multiple votes might be taken together – or remote voting. What’s more, it’s noted that remote voting has continued in a number of parliaments – and even the House of Lords have maintained online voting since Covid-19 (albeit restricted to circumstances when Members are on the parliamentary estate).

## A hybrid House

### Rating: Recommendations not met

#### Background

Beyond remote voting, many reports have suggested expanding online participation to other aspects of Parliamentary work. Most of the hybrid/online measures implemented during Covid-19 were not extended after they expired in June and July 2022.<sup>90</sup> Some witnesses for select committees can continue to participate remotely.<sup>91</sup> The impact of these measures on diversity has not been the subject of a parliamentary inquiry – as suggested by a UN Women Report, however a number of studies and international best practice suggest that hybridity may be beneficial for women and underrepresented groups.<sup>92</sup>

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Procedure Committee: Undertake an inquiry into the online measures introduced during Covid-19 and highlight measures which should be continued to support greater inclusivity and diversity. The remit should be broad and include, but not be limited to, measures introduced in the Chamber and committee meetings.<sup>93</sup>
- Leader of the House: Move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure Committee on online participation and hybridity, giving the House time for debate and allowing for a free vote.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Communications with Liaison Committee; UK Parliament, *COVID-19 proceedings: Timeline of temporary arrangements*.

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/covid-19-proceedings-in-the-house-of-commons/covid-19-proceedings-timeline-of-temporary-arrangements/>

<sup>91</sup> UK Parliament, ‘Witnesses and oral evidence’, MPs’ Guide to Procedure.

<sup>92</sup> Ting, Wang Leung (Kiwi) (2021) You are Unmuted: the impact of hybrid proceedings on MPs’ participation during the pandemic *LSE blog* <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/government/2021/05/24/you-are-unmuted-the-impact-of-hybrid-proceedings-on-mps-participation-during-the-pandemic/>

MPs call for urgent review of hybrid Parliament measures (12 Sep 2021) <https://www.centenaryaction.org.uk/news-and-comment/mps-call-for-urgent-review-of-hybrid-parliament-measures>

The Remotely Representative House 2021

UN Women (2020) A Primer for Parliamentary Action: Gender Sensitive Responses to Covid-19.

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/A-primer-for-parliamentary-action-Gender-sensitive-responses-to-COVID-19-en.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> “Proper consideration should be given to the benefits of retaining aspects of [Covid 19 procedures] ... procedure is a matter for the House as a whole and MPs should be given the opportunity to make their personal experiences and views known, free from party political considerations” (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022).

“Research should be undertaken either (a) in-house or (b) through the commissioning of independent research, to assess the relative effectiveness of virtual, hybrid and in-person Select Committees, including the effect on witness diversity, Committee cohesion, committee efficiency, and scrutiny and impact” “Commission research into how comparable parliaments enable ‘spontaneity’ in virtual and/or hybrid debate proceedings, identify and publish international ‘best practice’” (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

“Review all measures introduced during COVID to see the impact on equality and diversity, and make results public ... Collate, analyse and make publicly available data on the diversity impact of all COVID-19 procedures and reforms, specifying differential use by members of the different ways of virtual working” (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>94</sup> “The Leader of the House should move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure or Liaison Committees on hybridity, giving the House time for debate and allowing for a free vote” (The Remotely Representative House 2021)



- Restoration and Renewal Client Board: Embed provision of facilities to support hybrid and online participation in Parliament into the restoration and renewal processes.<sup>95</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

Proper consideration needs to be given to retaining aspects of the hybridity introduced for the Covid-19 pandemic. As Equality in the Heart of Democracy (2021-2022) put it ‘Measures adopted through necessity have demonstrated what is possible.’ Key to this is an inquiry into the impact of Covid measures with a specific focus on the impact it had on underrepresented groups in addition to MPs’ broader reflections on how it affected Parliament’s culture. Pending the inquiry outcomes, recommendations should then be made about the reintroduction of any Covid measures.

## Addressing workloads

### Rating: Recommendations not met

#### Background

The role of an MP is a very demanding one – balancing a range of different roles and responsibilities. This can make the role inaccessible for many – especially those with caring responsibilities. Furthermore, the inflexibility of working practices and procedures can also make it a difficult job for those who are disabled or have a long-term health condition. Most of the recommendations to help address this problem include increasing predictability of the work schedule, and the introduction of more hybrid and online ways of working. These have been addressed above and should be the priority because it is important that being an MP should be accessible to anyone who is qualified to do it. Other relevant recommendations are outlined below.

#### Outstanding Recommendations

- Government: Review legislation to allow (a trial of) job-sharing for MPs.<sup>96</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Set expectations in relation to committee workload.<sup>97</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

The priority should be reforming Parliament to ensure that the job of being an MP is accessible even to those with disabilities and caring responsibilities. However, if this is not possible then alternatives must be considered. While many jobs can now be facilitated using a job-sharing arrangement, Members of Parliament are currently not able to do this. MP job sharing could help to make the role accessible to those with caring responsibilities and also improve disabled people’s participation in political and public life, or those who wish to continue with their professions.<sup>98</sup> The 2014 report *Improving Parliament* suggested looking into this possibility as did the Fawcett Society publication ‘Open House’.<sup>99</sup> Legal judgements – in the 2015 Phipps and Cope case – have concluded this issue requires legislative reforms.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, the impetus lies with the Government to conduct a review into the adoption of MP job sharing arrangements. With legislative change, a limited trial could be undertaken.

## Equitable travel

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

<sup>95</sup> “During R&R, provide remote voting for all Members and centre hybrid and remote participation in all planning for a restored House of Commons.” (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

<sup>96</sup> “Review the possibility of job sharing for MPs and Ministers” (Improving Parliament 2014)

<sup>97</sup> [Review] “Setting expectations in relation to committee workload, including in relation to consideration of committee reports and the timing of Committee visits.” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>98</sup> Disability Politics UK website <https://www.disabilitypolitics.org.uk>

Fawcett Society (2017) Open House? Reflections on the possibility and practice of MPs job sharing <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=bb90467f-174b-4f68-801a-4ae04e4fd33c>

<sup>99</sup> Fawcett Society (2017) Open House? Reflections on the possibility and practice of MPs job sharing <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=bb90467f-174b-4f68-801a-4ae04e4fd33c>

<sup>100</sup> BBC News (2015) Green Basingstoke MP job share nomination rejected <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-england-32248191>

## Background

Travel is often an important part of the work of select committees. However, overseas travel can be more difficult for those with caring responsibilities, disabled MPs or those with long-term illnesses. Recommendations highlight the importance of flexible and supportive policies to maximise inclusion and ensure these opportunities are extended to everyone.<sup>101</sup> Currently, the Commons Liaison Committee considers reasonable adjustments to enable MPs to fully participate in committee visits as part of the process for allocating visit funding.<sup>102</sup> However, it has been noted that the scope of adjustments are limited by the circumstances/contexts of locations where committee visits are held.

## Outstanding recommendations

- Commons Liaison Committee: Introduce new select committee travel guidelines outlining best practice including restricting travel to weekdays, and parliamentary sitting time where possible and including a provision to cover additional childcare costs incurred in the course of travel.<sup>103</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Ensure equitable opportunities for committee trips through the provision of funding.<sup>104</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Ensure gender balance on committee trips.<sup>105</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action.

To ensure maximum transparency, the Commons Liaison Committee should publish guidelines outlining the types of reasonable adjustments that can be made to support members' participation in overseas trips. Noting that travel and logistical arrangements often dictate the date/timing of visits, the guidance should adopt guiding principles encouraging committee trips to be made during sitting weeks and not during school holidays.

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<sup>101</sup> UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018;

*"Ensure that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to parliamentarians equitably and transparently"* (Plan of Action 2017);

*"Ensuring that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to parliamentarians equitably and transparently, with equality of participation as one of the goals of a fair system of allowances and expenses;"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>102</sup> Liaison Committee guidelines for overseas travel (2011, endorsed 2018) <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/103/liaison-committee-commons/content/108754/liaison-committee-guidelines-for-overseas-travel/>

Communications with Liaison Committee (April-May 2023)

<sup>103</sup> *"New select committee travel guidelines should be introduced by the Liaison Committees of each House, with international organisations encouraged to do the same. Guidelines might include: Restricting travel to weekdays where possible; Restricting travel to parliamentary sitting time where possible (although we had differing views as to whether this would be helpful); Introducing a provision whereby additional childcare costs incurred in the course of select committee travel may be claimed; and Proactively promoting existing provisions from international assemblies or associations to assist with childcare."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>104</sup> *"Ensure that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to parliamentarians equitably and transparently and that parliamentary delegations are gender-balanced, when possible."* (Plan of Action 2017);

*"Ensure that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to parliamentarians equitably and transparently, with equality of participation as one of the goals of a fair system of allowances and expenses."* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>105</sup> *"Ensuring gender balance on study tours and in international delegations on gender equality or gender mainstreaming."* (Plan of Action 2017);

*"Internal rule changes to guarantee a proportional and equitable distribution of women parliamentarians across all committees ... and parliamentary delegations;"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)



## Parents and carers in Parliament

	Sources for the recommendations									Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice						
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)			
Parental leave	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	
Carer's leave		X		X				X		X		
Children in Parliament		X	X	X		X	X				X	
Equitable business costs	X	X	X	X	X			X			X	

## Parental leave

**Rating: Recommendations partially met**

### Background

Parental leave for parliamentarians is a complex issue due to the fact that MPs are not employees but elected representatives. Until recently there was no formal and institutionalised mechanism through which MPs and Ministers with newborns and newly adopted children could go on parental leave. In recent years provisions have been introduced to provide funds and proxy votes for MPs. These provisions have addressed many of the recommendations from previous reports and international best practice, but still do not equate to parental leave.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>106</sup> "Introduce parental leave for MPs" "Formalise pairing relationship of MPs to cover when a MP is on maternity or paternity leave" "Consider additional staffing budgets and resources for Members if they require maternity or paternity leave" (Improving Parliament 2014);  
 "Produce a House Statement on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave." (The Good Parliament 2016);  
 "At the time of agreeing our report, the House of Commons had not yet considered a substantive motion to implement its decision in principle to allow new parents to vote in a division by proxy. Such a motion should be brought forward immediately." "[Re new parents] MPs taking leave from the House in this way should not be subject to any reduction in their staffing budgets, as the work of their offices is likely, if anything, to increase during this time." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);  
 "We believe, in the interest of gender sensitivity, that additional costs associated with childcare and parenthood should be published only at the aggregate, rather than individual MP, level, as is the case with costs associated with disability and security." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);  
 "Consider alternatives where long-term parental leave cannot be implemented, such as accepting parental leave as a legitimate reason for missing a sitting day" (Plan of Action 2017);  
 "Support all parliamentarians with caring responsibilities ... by offering them alternatives to chamber duty and voting such as paid parental leave and carer's leave, flexible working arrangements (including remote voting), a proxy vote or vote pairing." (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

Progress has been made in adopting recommendations from previous reports resulting in enhanced supports available to parents with young children through proxy voting and IPSA's Parental Leave and Absence Fund.<sup>107</sup> However, there is still much that needs to be done. For example, proxy voting can only be used for seven months – this does not reflect entitlements under statutory maternity leave, and MPs cannot take full leave as the funds and proxy voting do not cover the full extent of an MPs commitments.

Currently, through the Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021, ministers who are expectant or new mothers are entitled to paid leave for six months, and there is funding available to cover their replacement, however they are not entitled to take up their old position at the end of their leave – this is at the discretion of the Prime Minister.<sup>108</sup> This does not echo the entitlements granted through statutory maternity leave and is only available to women. While the introduction of this leave is a major step, it does not meet all the recommendations.

Furthermore, while the Parental Leave and Absence Fund covers hiring staff to support MPs' constituency work while they are on leave it does not cover their Parliamentary work including in debates and committees. There are international examples of how this can be done e.g. Denmark allows the appointment of a Parliamentary substitute while MPs are on leave.<sup>109</sup>

### Outstanding recommendations

- Procedure Committee: Review extending proxy voting from 7 to 12 months.<sup>110</sup>
- Procedure Committee: Review making changes to proxy voting to explicitly cover parents through surrogacy.<sup>111</sup>
- Government: Expand the current maternity leave to include parental leave for ministers.<sup>112</sup>
- Procedure Committee: Remove reference to 'due date' from proxy voting scheme.<sup>113</sup>
- IPSA: Continue to update the Parental Leave Absence Fund to echo any changes made by Parliament to the proxy voting scheme.<sup>114</sup>
- Government: Introduce legislation to allow for parental leave for MPs in which all their work in the constituency and Parliament can be covered.<sup>115</sup>
- Members' Services Team: Ensure support – such as training and guidance - is provided to parent MPs returning from leave.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Proxy voting scheme (2023);

IPSA online, Funding to support MP parental leave & absence (accessed 2023) <https://www.ipsaonline.org.uk/guidance/leave-and-holidays#funding-to-support-mp-parental-leave-absence>;

<sup>108</sup> Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/5/section/1>

<sup>109</sup> A House for Everyone 2023 p32

<sup>110</sup> *"However, we note witnesses' concerns that the [proxy voting for new parents and those with long term illnesses and post childbirth complications, miscarriage and babyloss] scheme does not mirror statutory maternity leave entitlements or best workplace practice, in which parents can choose to share up to 12 months of leave"* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>111</sup> *"IPSA should also make clear the arrangements for parents of children born through surrogacy."* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

Parents through surrogacy are currently mentioned in: IPSA online, Funding to support MP parental leave & absence (accessed 2023) but not in the Proxy voting scheme (2023) or the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (2023) The Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs 2023-2024

<sup>112</sup> *"Introduce parental leave for MPs and ministers, to include a salary for a covering minister."* (Improving Parliament 2014);

*"Expand the scope of the Ministerial and other Maternity Allowances Act 2021, to include paternity and shared parental leave while also clarifying it is an entitlement and not subject to discretion."* (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>113</sup> *"[The scheme's] reference to 'due date' in relation to the start of the period of proxy voting for biological mothers could have unintended negative effects on those who give birth prematurely or later than expected."* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>114</sup> *"We recommend that IPSA consult on extending the current support offered through the MP parental leave cover fund to biological fathers, partners and second adopters so that it is in line with best workplace practice and supports the objective of enabling women and men to share childcare responsibilities."* *"IPSA should also make clear the arrangements for parents of children born through surrogacy."* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

Communications with IPSA indicate that "the IPSA guidance currently goes further than the rules of the proxy voting scheme and is intentionally constructed in a flexible way, it can already accommodate changes made by the House of Commons on proxy voting within the IPSA guidance as published" (IPSA May 2023).

<sup>115</sup> *"Introduce legislation to ensure all MPs have access to parental leave guided by the principles identified in the Report"* (A House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>116</sup> *"In order to ensure that childcare commitments are not a barrier to career progression, the two Administrations should consider what more support should be provided, specifically for women returning to work from maternity leave, drawing on best practice from elsewhere."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

## Discussion and recommended action

The progress that has been made in this area in the last few years should not be understated. However, Parliament's support for parent MPs still has a way to go before it truly embeds a gender sensitive model. The entitlements must be expanded to reflect those available under the statutory scheme.<sup>117</sup> In addition to constituency cover, which is currently funded through IPSA, the Government should introduce legislation which enables MPs' parliamentary activities to be covered while they are on parental leave. A lack of coverage to this effect undermines democracy. In the short term, as noted by the Procedure Committee, the "Government should ensure that a nominated member of staff of any Member exercising a proxy vote has access to any meetings, calls or briefings made generally available to Members of Parliament".<sup>118</sup> Longer term, for the House of Commons to meet international best practice and address this requires serious consideration of alternative options some of which might require government legislation, such as substitute MPs, job-sharing, increasing possibilities for remote participation in the Chamber and committees.

For ministers, the current leave system does not meet the 2014 recommendation that *parental* leave be introduced for ministers. This should be rectified to ensure that legislation does not reinforce current cultural norms around gender and childcare.

## Carer's leave

### Rating: Recommendations not met

#### Background

Currently, proxy voting is available to MPs on parental leave and current recommendations suggest it should be extended to MPs with serious long-term illnesses and injuries. The scheme does not include MPs with broader caring responsibilities including those looking after older children and adults. Given this, there are a number of key outstanding recommendations relating to supporting MPs with caring responsibilities.

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Procedure Committee: Review extending proxy voting to support MPs with caring responsibilities.<sup>119</sup>
- Procedure Committee and Leader of the House: Implement flexible working arrangements (outlined elsewhere in this report) to support MPs with caring responsibilities.<sup>120</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

Expand proxy voting for those with caring responsibilities.

The changes that have been introduced for new parents show that the House of Commons is catching up with workplace norms. Caring responsibilities do not just fall upon new parents, but Members from all walks of life. A new proxy voting pilot for MPs with caring responsibilities should be launched – reflecting feedback and insights from the current pilot. This should be done

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<sup>117</sup> Maternity pay and leave. <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave>

<sup>118</sup> House of Commons Procedure Committee (2022) Proxy voting and the presence of babies in the Chamber and Westminster Hall: First Report of Session 2022-23 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22837/documents/173562/default/>

<sup>119</sup> "We also consider that the parties should look to reinforce informal pairing arrangements for other caring needs; and recommend that consideration be given by the House of Commons to how, where pairing is used, the members in question might have their vote "by pair" formally recorded." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

"Support all parliamentarians with caring responsibilities by offering them alternatives to chamber duty and voting, such as paid... carer's leave, flexible working arrangements (including remote voting), a proxy vote or vote pairing" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021).

"Following the permanent change to Standing Orders relating to Baby leave, recommend the extension of proxy voting to other categories of Member: inter alia, those suffering from serious illness, those with caring responsibilities, and those who are bereaved." (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

<sup>120</sup> "Produce a house statement on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption and caring leave" (The Good Parliament 2016)

"We welcome the recent extension of the extended leave fund to cover a greater range of MPs' absences from Westminster, including for ill health and wider caring responsibilities. We also welcome the establishment of a new working group in IPSA to consider how to further embed and improve extended leave support, in the interests of a more inclusive and family-friendly working environment." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

"Support all parliamentarians with caring responsibilities by offering them alternatives to chamber duty and voting, such as paid... carer's leave, flexible working arrangements (including remote voting), a proxy vote or vote pairing." (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021).

alongside supporting greater flexibility in ways of working, IPSA's broadly framed scheme may have scope within it already to cover carer's leave, further IPSA should reflect any amendments to the proxy voting scheme.<sup>121</sup>

## Children in Parliament

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

There have been changes made in recent years to create family friendly spaces for use by those working on the parliamentary estate. A nursery has been established which is available to children of MPs and staff who work on the parliamentary estate. There are also a number of family rooms available for MPs in addition to baby change rooms.<sup>122</sup> The introduction of these facilities meets some of the recommendations.<sup>123</sup> Questions surrounding the adequacy of childcare provision are included in surveys of Members, and the Women and Equalities Committee ran a survey in 2022 on Members' Childcare Responsibilities, Caregiving and Access Needs. However the results of these surveys are not public, so it is unclear how well these needs are met.<sup>124</sup>

Members may be accompanied by their children anywhere apart from the Chamber and Westminster Hall, except when on the way to divisions. Babies and small children can be carried in the divisions lobby.

The House of Commons Commission suggested that information on provisions for parents would be brought together in a handbook and intranet site, but it is unclear whether this has been done.<sup>125</sup>

#### Outstanding recommendations

- House of Commons Commission, Speaker, and Parliamentary Digital Service: Develop a parliamentary policy for children and families, and an information tool for parents working in Parliament.<sup>126</sup>
- Administration Committee: Assess the sufficiency and availability for both men and women of facilities for childcare, baby changing, breastfeeding and expressing milk for MPs, staff and visitors.<sup>127</sup>
- Administration Committee: Consider creating a crèche facility in Parliament.<sup>128</sup>
- House of Commons' Head of Access and Services: Review access and facilities for children to Parliament, including breastfeeding in the Chamber and Westminster Hall, the adequacy of family rooms, and accessible parking for parents and carers.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> IPSA online, Funding to support MP parental leave & absence (accessed 2023)

Communications with IPSA

<sup>122</sup> Communication with representative of the Members' Services Team.

<sup>123</sup> "Allocate space in the parliamentary building for a ... family room so that parliamentarians can be close to their children during sittings." (Plan of Action 2017)

<sup>124</sup> Communications with representatives of the Members' Services Team and Cultural Transformation Team.

<sup>125</sup> House of Commons Commission (2022) Gender Sensitive Parliament audit: 2022 submission to the Women and Equalities Committee [committees.parliament.uk/publications/31810/documents/178831/default/](https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/31810/documents/178831/default/)

<sup>126</sup> "Developing a parliamentary policy for children and families, informed by good practice in other parliaments, would be an initial first step to a more family-friendly institution and would also address safeguarding concerns. Such a policy should include the following: a. Clearer guidance on what is allowed, including a provision that infant feeding should be allowed everywhere; b. A clear statement of safeguarding issues and expectations around supervision, including consideration of whether children and family members could be passholders; and c. An enhanced commitment and joined up approach to the provision of childcare" "[Provide] An information tool for parents working in parliament." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

"policy in this area is the responsibility of the House or the Speaker" House of Commons Commission (2022) Gender Sensitive Parliament audit: 2022 submission to the Women and Equalities Committee p2

<sup>127</sup> "Better facilities for expressing milk (including for visitors)" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

"[Survey MPs on] (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>128</sup> "Undertake a review for the provision of a crèche facility on the Parliamentary Estate (in addition to the nursery)" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"Allocate space in the parliamentary building for a childcare centre ... so that parliamentarians can be close to their children during sittings." (Plan of Action 2017);

<sup>129</sup> "Such a policy should include ... a provision that infant feeding should be allowed everywhere;" "Facilities should be provided... We would expect these to include ... b. Retaining the Family Rooms as dedicated spaces for families but with improvements and more consistent enforcement of their use for these purposes; c. Provision for children and family members of different ages (including older children);" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

## Discussion and recommended action

It is clear that there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach to provisions around accommodating MPs caring responsibilities for children and infants. The most important recommendation would be to develop a parliamentary policy for children and families. Future provisions should be coordinated, to ensure inclusivity of those with caring responsibilities.

As a first step, Parliament should ensure the provision of accessible parking for parents and carers, family rooms, and facilities for breastfeeding and expressing milk is sufficient for the needs of MPs, staff and visitors. The survey results should help guide this action.

The question of the presence of children and infant feeding in the Chamber highlights the lack of co-ordination. Professor Sarah Childs contends that permitting babies in the Chamber is important in order to reduce the gender and motherhood gap at Westminster, as well as a way of role modelling inclusive workplace best practice.<sup>130</sup> If breastfeeding is not to be permitted in the Chamber - as has been restated in a recent report – then other means should be provided to allow infant feeding MPs to participate fully in all proceedings.<sup>131</sup> This might be through remote participation, a crèche, funding for a nanny and/or to allow her to express milk while attending proceedings? An international comparison highlights that Westminster's approach towards is lagging behind other comparable countries. For example, in 2016 Australia's Parliament amended its standing orders to allow breast and bottle feeding.

## Equitable business costs

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

The business costs of Members vary significantly depending on a number of factors, including whether they have caring responsibilities. As outlined above, IPSA's recent creation of the Parental Leave and Absence Fund is a significant step forward. It reflects recommendations made in previous reports about the need for parental leave. Further, MPs with dependent children have increased accommodation allowances for rental properties to enable them to "meet any additional costs...associated with having dependents." This provision means that many of the recommendations have been met.<sup>132</sup>

#### Outstanding recommendations:

- IPSA: Continue to conduct Equality Impact Assessments of the scheme.<sup>133</sup>
- IPSA: Assess whether more needs to be done to support MPs childcare costs.<sup>134</sup>

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*"We recommend the House of Commons' Head of Access and Services swiftly review the availability of ground level parking spaces close to the Chamber and, taking into account the needs of disabled Blue Badge holders, designate the maximum possible number for parent and child parking" "We recommend the House of Commons Member Services Team conduct a survey of MPs...[and] gather MPs' views on: ... • access rules, including the rules on MPs' babies in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall;" (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)*

<sup>130</sup> Childs, S. 'Written Evidence Submitted by Professor Sarah Childs, Royal Holloway, University of London on Whether the Presence of babies during parliamentary proceedings in the House of Commons should be prohibited or permitted'

<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/106329/html/>

<sup>131</sup> House of Commons Procedure Committee (2022) Proxy voting and the presence of babies in the Chamber and Westminster Hall;

<sup>132</sup> "Provide clarification on support available to MPs with primary caring responsibilities within the new expenses system to make it more family friendly." (Improving Parliament 2014)

*"Ensuring that allowances and parliamentary travel entitlements are provided to parliamentarians equitably and transparently, with equality of participation as one of the goals of a fair system of allowances and expenses." (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)*

*"Fully resourcing family-friendly arrangements so as not to increase the care burden of individual MPs" (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)*

<sup>133</sup> *"We note that the last Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of IPSA's Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs was published in 2017 and its intention to conduct an EIA alongside the next comprehensive review of the scheme, no later than 2024. We recommend that IPSA ensures the EIA is comprehensive and fully in line with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's guidance on complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty. We further recommend that IPSA consider as part of its 2024 Corporate Plan the case for conducting more frequent EIAs of the scheme as and when significant changes are made between comprehensive reviews."* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

<sup>134</sup> *"We encourage IPSA to give consideration to how the childcare needs of MPs whose family life is unavoidably split between Westminster and their constituency might better be supported. This would be a natural extension of IPSA's recent decision to take account of the different accommodation needs of MPs, which we welcome."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

*"Cover after hours childcare costs for MPs" (A House for Everyone 2023)*

- IPSA: Record business costs associated with having dependants at the aggregate level.<sup>135</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action:

There are three clear outstanding recommendations. The first and broadest is to ensure that regular Equality Impact Assessments are embedded within the scheme. Second, and related to this, IPSA should assess the extent to which childcare costs might be further covered. This is currently not under consideration by IPSA.<sup>136</sup> Third, IPSA should record business costs associated with having dependent children at the aggregate level – as is currently being considered as part of a wider IPSA review.<sup>137</sup> This will mean that MPs with dependents who live far away from London are not stigmatised for being ‘more expensive’ than other MPs. Not only will this support MPs but it also ensures consistency with how they record costs associated with using the Parental Leave and Absence Fund.

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<sup>135</sup> “IPSA should also give consideration to the means in which these claims are reported, so that no-one in need is deterred from accessing support.” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

*“We recommend that IPSA make a transparent assessment of the impact of publishing additional costs associated with being a parent—including parental leave cover, and additional transport and accommodation costs in relation to dependent children—on the willingness of women and parent MPs to claim support. While we understand and support the imperative for transparency as a default, we believe, in the interest of gender sensitivity, that additional costs associated with childcare and parenthood should be published only at the aggregate, rather than individual MP, level, as is the case with costs associated with disability and security.”* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022)

<sup>136</sup> Communications with IPSA

<sup>137</sup> Communications with IPSA



# Culture

This section looks at the culture of Parliament and the work that has been done to make Parliament a more respectful and inclusive workplace with a focus on behaviour, safety and culture. It is important to ensure in Parliament, as in any other workplace, that those working there can do so without fear for their safety or of suffering abuse and harassment. It is important that the overall culture is welcoming of those with diverse backgrounds and needs. For MPs the question of safety and security extends beyond Parliament into their constituency offices. The shocking murders of Jo Cox in 2016 and Sir David Amess in 2021 were both tragic and were an attack on British democratic life. They also show that security threats to MPs are real and must be taken seriously. The security provided by Parliament must extend as far as possible to cover MPs in parliament as well as in the constituency as well as their staff. Safety and security are highly gendered, with women often suffering greater online abuse, and facing threats of a more sexualised nature. Black and Minority Ethnic women are suffer disproportionately with both racist and sexist abuse. The culture within the UK Parliament both reflects and impacts the wider political culture, and if Parliament is not somewhere that all people feel included and respected, it is ultimately our democracy that is damaged.

There have been important developments within Parliament which aim to make it a safer, more welcoming and supportive environment. Most prominently, is the creation of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) for addressing complaints of bullying, sexual harassment and abuse. The creation of this body is significant progress. However, ongoing allegations of harassment and abuse attest to the fact that the underlying cultural change has not yet taken place.

Elsewhere in Parliament small but important steps have taken place over the last decade in diversifying the art collection and redesigning the identity cards, which help point to a more welcoming Parliament.

In respect of administration there are Workplace Equality Networks within Parliament, where issues and ideas related to diversity and inclusion can be discussed. They also host events and awareness raising activities.<sup>138</sup> The UK Parliament Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2023-2027 shows that there is a commitment to fostering an inclusive environment in Parliament.<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, if Parliament really seeks to become more inclusive it must change. The following recommendations are the most prominent from the three sections below.

## Key Recommendations

1. Continue to review ICGS and take action to address where it is not working.
2. Require parliamentarians to make a commitment that they will uphold the *Behaviour Code* and promote an inclusive workplace culture.
3. Consider requiring training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.
4. Monitor effectiveness of the Online Safety Bill and Elections Act.
5. Consider alternative formats for Prime Minister's Questions, where professional behaviour is encouraged.
6. Conduct an inquiry into gender sensitivity of parliamentary rituals, practices, ceremonies and language to improve transparency with recommendations made highlighting where changes need to be made to make Parliament more inclusive.
- 7.

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<sup>138</sup> Workplace Equality Networks (accessed 2023) <https://www.parliament.uk/about/working/workplace-equality-networks/>

<sup>139</sup> Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2023-2027 (accessed 2023) UK Parliament <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/house-of-commons-commission/hoc-diversity-inclusion-strategy/>

## Abuse, harassment and bullying within Parliament

	Sources for the recommendations										Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice							
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians (2016) <sup>140</sup>	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)			
Reporting and accountability body			X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Policies to prevent harassment				X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Training to prevent harassment	X		X		X	X	X		X	X		X	
Bad behaviour in the Chamber	X	X	X	X	X						X		

## Reporting and accountability body for harassment, bullying and sexual misconduct

**Rating: Recommendations largely met – but underlying issue not resolved**

### Background

Harassment, bullying and sexual misconduct have been found to be highly prevalent within Parliament. Back in 2018, the report by Laura Cox into the bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff, painted a worrying picture but recent news of MPs being suspended and staffers still complaining of a ‘predatory culture’ shows that not enough has changed.<sup>141</sup>

Numerous reports have called for an independent complaints scheme to address abuse and harassment in Parliament.<sup>142</sup> The creation of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) in 2018 was a significant step in achieving this goal.

<sup>140</sup> This report is included in this section as it deals specifically with questions around violence abuse and safety.

<sup>141</sup> Cox, L.(2018) ‘The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff, Independent Inquiry Report’.

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/dame-laura-cox-independent-inquiry-report.pdf>

BBC News (2023) Westminster: House of Commons culture still ‘predatory’, say staff <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66097839>

<sup>142</sup> [Create] “the mechanisms necessary for women, including women parliamentarians, to report and lodge complaints against all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence – affecting themselves or others known to them.” (Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016)

“Establishment of an independent body to which complaints can be submitted and addressed” (Plan of Action 2017)



Since its establishment, changes have been made to improve the scheme, namely the creation of an Independent Expert Panel. There is also an Independent Bullying and Harassment Helpline and a separate Independent Sexual Misconduct Advisory Service – where complainants and respondents can access confidential advice.<sup>143</sup>

Surrounding and supporting the ICGS there are trainings provided through Members Services, and the House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team (detailed below), proactive communications to staff and members about where support and HR services are available, and there are surveys regularly conducted by Members Services – such as the House Service annual survey - which includes questions relating to abuse, harassment and the culture of Parliament.<sup>144</sup> The House of Commons Commission has also taken subsequent actions to support the scheme including the establishment of a network of Guardians - trained members of staff who seek to champion respectful behaviour as well as being a sounding board for colleagues who may have questions about where to seek advice or information.<sup>145</sup> In addition, the Speaker's Conference is currently looking at the employment of Members' staff – with a report accompanied by recommendations expected shortly.

A recent report by the House of Commons Commission addresses a recommendation from the *Equality in the Heart of Democracy* report and suggests MPs under investigation for sexual or violent offences are considered for exclusion by a panel in order to reduce risk, but excluded Members should be given a proxy vote.<sup>146</sup> These suggestions will be debated in the House.

The creation of the ICGS alongside the Independent Expert Panel, together with the additional supporting provision, demonstrates Parliament's commitment to driving cultural change. Combined, these actions have largely addressed the recommendations made in previous reports. However, it seems that the underlying issues surrounding harassment, abuse and sexual misconduct in the House of Commons have not been adequately addressed.

### Outstanding recommendations

- ICGS: Continue to review the scheme regularly and whether there is adequate support for whistle blowers, and consider how the scheme might better identify and respond to inappropriate behaviour, including third party reporting.<sup>147</sup>

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*"Is there an independent grievance scheme for those experiencing gendered inappropriate behaviour?"* (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020); *"Establishing independent mechanisms for complaints handling and redress"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>143</sup> Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme website <https://www.parliament.uk/about/independent-complaints-and-grievance-scheme/get-support-icgs/>

<sup>144</sup> *"Proactive communication on where members' and Administration staff can seek HR and external forms of support, and making the HR Advisory Service available for MPs in the Customer Hub"* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

Communications with representatives of the Members' Services Team and Cultural Transformation Team.

<sup>145</sup> House of Commons Commission (2022) Gender-Sensitive Parliament audit: 2022 submission to the Women and Equalities Committee p1

<sup>146</sup> House of Commons Commission (2023) Risk-based exclusion of MPs: consultation response and proposals

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/40194/documents/196592/default/>

*"In other workplaces, suspension of employees under investigation for sexual misconduct is rightly considered the norm .... However, exclusion of MPs from Parliament is not straightforward. MPs are not employees, they are individually elected postholders, with a specific constitutional and democratic role as their constituents' sole representative in the legislature. This status must be balanced with the need to protect the parliamentary community from potential harm, particularly given the risk of repeat behaviour by men who engage in sexual misconduct. The complex employment relationships in the House of Commons and parliamentary constituencies may mean there is no perfect solution to this issue. However, the House should consider whether the current approach, based on case-by-case risk assessments, potential withdrawal of services and facilities and, where necessary, informal agreement through the usual channels that an MP under investigation should not attend Parliament, provides the right balance. We recommend the House of Commons Procedure Committee seek fuller advice from the House's procedural and legal advisers on the issues around balancing protecting people, in Parliament and constituencies, from harm, and constituents' rights to political representation. The Procedure Committee should consider, in the light of this advice, whether to inquire into this matter further and bring forward recommendations, taking into account the need to: • maintain confidentiality for complainants and respondents; • maintain a presumption of innocence and ensure fair investigations; and • mitigate any undue risk of vexatious allegations."* (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

<sup>147</sup> *"Better support for whistle-blowers"* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

*"In other workplaces, suspension of employees under investigation for sexual misconduct is rightly considered the norm .... However, exclusion of MPs from Parliament is not straightforward. MPs are not employees, they are individually elected postholders, with a specific constitutional and democratic role as their constituents' sole representative in the legislature. This status must be balanced with the need to protect the parliamentary community from potential harm, particularly given the risk of repeat behaviour by men who engage in sexual misconduct. The complex employment relationships in the House of Commons and parliamentary constituencies may mean there is no perfect solution to this issue. However, the House should consider whether the current approach, based on case-by-case risk assessments, potential withdrawal of services and facilities and, where necessary, informal agreement through the usual channels that an MP under*

- Members' Services Team and ICGS: Consider whether to provide training to support Members and staff having difficult conversations.<sup>148</sup>

## Discussion

The key recommendations have been met, and the outstanding recommendations build upon the existing framework. Currently, there have been two reviews of the ICGS – regular reviews should continue as it serves as an opportunity to examine its effectiveness and make subsequent improvements with a focus on the issues outlined above. While there are trainings available to staff and members, the *Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit* (2018) specifically suggested training should be available on having and supporting difficult conversations.

What further steps might be taken at this stage is unclear. Accounts of abuse and harassment continue to emerge from the UK Parliament, and the new Advisory Group might consider whether that requires reform to the ICGS, or to put in place measures to mitigate the power dynamic which enables this predatory environment - which is a problem in many industries where there are a large number of young people working on insecure contracts for people with much greater levels of power.

## Policies to prevent harassment, discrimination and abuse

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Many reports recommended introducing clear guidelines and a code of conduct to underpin cultural change and support respectful behaviour and inclusivity.<sup>149</sup> Over the past few years, a number of new parliamentary policies and procedures have been developed to address and prevent gendered harassment, discrimination and abuse. There is a *Behaviour Code* which underpins the ICGS, a *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, a *Bullying and Harassment Policy* and associated procedures and guidance issued by the ICGS.<sup>150</sup> In addition, there is the new *Code of Conduct* and the Speaker's *Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons*.<sup>151</sup> The Committee on Standards emphasises that Members of Parliament should, in their role as leaders aspire to 'exemplify anti-discriminatory attitudes in their own behaviour in relation to the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.'<sup>152</sup> The House of Commons Administration prioritises inclusivity as one of its organisational values, and all policies introduced by the House Service should be informed by an Inclusion Impact Assessment which includes consideration

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*investigation should not attend Parliament, provides the right balance. We recommend the House of Commons Procedure Committee seek fuller advice from the House's procedural and legal advisers on the issues around balancing protecting people, in Parliament and constituencies, from harm, and constituents' rights to political representation. The Procedure Committee should consider, in the light of this advice, whether to inquire into this matter further and bring forward recommendations, taking into account the need to:* • maintain confidentiality for complainants and respondents; • maintain a presumption of innocence and ensure fair investigations; and • mitigate any undue risk of vexatious allegations." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

"Consider how the Scheme can better identify and respond to inappropriate behaviour, including third party reporting" (A House for Everyone 2023);

<sup>148</sup> "Training for staff on having difficult conversations and for line managers on how to support them" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018),

<sup>149</sup> "Introduce a code of conduct that requires all parliamentarians to be respectful and courteous" (Plan of Action 2017);

"Does your parliament's code of conduct govern relations between parliamentarians, between parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, and between parliamentarians and their staff?" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020); Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021; Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016)

<sup>150</sup> UK Parliament Behaviour Code <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/ukparliamentbehaviourcode.pdf> ;

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (2022b) Sexual Misconduct Policy for UK Parliament

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/sexual-misconduct-policy2.pdf> ;

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (2022a) Bullying and Harassment Policy for UK Parliament

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/bullying-and-harassment-policy.pdf> ;

<sup>151</sup> House of Commons (2021) Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons, Issued by the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/rules-of-behaviour.pdf>

House of Commons Committee on Standards, (2022) First Report of Session 2022-2023, New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour in Parliament

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22338/documents/165774/default/>

<sup>152</sup> House of Commons Committee on Standards, (2022) New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules (p8)

of issues relating to sex and gender.<sup>153</sup> There is a House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and the House Services offers many of the services – such as workplace assessments – that a Diversity and Inclusion unit would provide.

The introduction of these policies and codes has met most of the key recommendations. However, international best practice recommends that codes of conduct specify that gendered discrimination and sexism should not be tolerated – as it stands there is only one mention of sexist comments being inappropriate in the current rules cited above – and that is only relating to online behaviour.<sup>154</sup> It remains clear, as outlined above, that parliamentary culture has not undergone a significant shift since these policies were introduced.

### Outstanding recommendations

- Standards Committee and ICGS: Require parliamentarians to make a commitment that they will uphold the *Behaviour Code* and promote an inclusive workplace culture.<sup>155</sup>
- ICGS: Include provisions in relevant parliamentary policies which recognise violence against women, the importance of intersectionality and highlight the unacceptability of sexism.<sup>156</sup>
- Government: Ensure MPs have greater access to legal protections in relation to sexual harassment.<sup>157</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

While many of the recommendations in this area have been met, there are a few recommendations from the international best practice reports which have not. While there are now clear codes of conduct in place, Parliament has not seen the shift in culture intended by these reforms. As such while these reforms provide a clear foundation for a change in culture, more needs to be done. A first step would be to bring the *Rules, Code* and other documents up to the standards of international best practice. The *Rules, Code* and numerous policies address and expressly prohibit bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct they do not currently meet the full extent of international best practice recommendations in this area – including naming the gendered elements of harassment and abuse. Nor do they explicitly mention violence against women and sexist language and behaviour as being unacceptable. Critically, all the policies and guidelines must acknowledge and reflect how intersecting identities affect minoritised groups experiences of discrimination, harassment and abuse.

Then Parliament should consider ensuring all parliamentarians commit to upholding the *Behaviour Code* by signing a document asserting their intention to abide by it and promote an inclusive and supportive parliamentary culture free of all forms of harassment. Further consideration should then be given to additional measures required to improve the culture – this might be led by the new Advisory Group.

## Training to prevent harassment and sexist behaviour

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

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<sup>153</sup> Communication with Cultural Transformation Team.

<sup>154</sup> Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (2022b) Sexual Misconduct Policy for UK Parliament (p6)

<sup>155</sup> [In Canada] “all House Members must now sign a document undertaking to keep the work environment free of sexual harassment and to respect the code of conduct in that regard” (Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016)

<sup>156</sup> “Introduce a code of conduct that requires all parliamentarians to be respectful and courteous and penalizes any language and behaviour that is considered sexist.” (Plan of Action 2017)

“Does your parliament’s code of conduct address (a) sexist language and behaviour; (b) sexual harassment and gendered bullying; and (c) violence against women?” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

“Reflecting an understanding of the causes and preventions of gender-based violence, and the importance of intersectionality, in the provisions of the code of conduct” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021); Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016;

<sup>157</sup> A House for Everyone 2023

## Background

Provision of comprehensive training about harassment, bullying and sexist behaviour has been recommended in a number of reports.<sup>158</sup> Training by Member Services entitled ‘The Behaviour Code – Why it Matters’ is a core component of the ICGS. It is a mandatory requirement for members’ staff and is offered widely to all members of the parliamentary community.

This online training aims to ensure that everyone in Parliament can recognise bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and feel able to take action to tackle and prevent it. It also provides participants with information about support services that are available. The training delivers on Alison Stanley’s 18-month review of the ICGS – namely the need for it to be refreshed and repeated at intervals.<sup>159</sup> The training is part of Parliament’s commitment to creating an inclusive and respectful workplace.

However, while there are high completion rates (over 90 percent for MPs and parliamentary staff) and there is an expectation that training is completed by parliamentary staff and MPs,<sup>160</sup> reports reference the need for *mandatory* training alongside the need for it to cover a broader range of issues related to gender and diversity. As highlighted in the sections above, the underlying issues of bullying and sexual harassment have not been addressed, and training is a key part in addressing this problem in the culture.

## Outstanding recommendations

- ICGS, House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and Members’ Services: Consider requiring current training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.<sup>161</sup>
- Members’ Services Team: Expand training to explicitly cover gender-awareness, sexism, sexual harassment and unconscious bias.<sup>162</sup>
- Members’ Services Team: Intersectional approaches to be embedded in training materials alongside coverage of broader issues pertaining to equality and diversity including the importance of a gender-sensitive Parliament.<sup>163</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

The introduction of training is an important step in the right direction. To ensure this training has the maximum impact, it should cover broader aspects of gender and diversity and include intersectional approaches. Training should be mandatory, with sanctions – from naming and shaming to services being withdrawn – for non-compliance.

## Bad behaviour in the Chamber

### Rating: Recommendations not met

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<sup>158</sup> UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018; Plan of Action 2017; Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020; Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021; Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022;

<sup>159</sup> Communications with a representative of the Members’ Services Team (April-May 2023);

Stanley, A. (2021) ‘Independent Complaints & Grievance Scheme Independent 18-Month Review’.

[https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/e3ed0297d92a400bb249c887a30aa59b/icgs-18-month-review\\_final.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/contentassets/e3ed0297d92a400bb249c887a30aa59b/icgs-18-month-review_final.pdf)

<sup>160</sup> Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (2022) 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Report (p17)

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/icgs-documents/icgs-4th-annual-report-2021-22.pdf>

<sup>161</sup> “passholders should be required to confirm they have completed a training course on bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

“Does your parliament provide training on the following, and is this compulsory for (a) parliamentarians; (b) parliamentarians’ staff; and (c) parliamentary staff? ...Sexual harassment & bullying” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

“Mandating anti-sexism and harassment training for all parliamentary workers” “evidence-based gender-sensitive curriculum for gender awareness training seminars for all members of parliament, and induction for new members” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>162</sup> “Provide gender-awareness training seminars for all members of parliament and ensure that induction for new members is gender-sensitive” “Providing gender-sensitive training programmes for men parliamentarians.” (Plan of Action 2017)

“Mandating anti-sexism and harassment training for all parliamentary workers” “evidence-based gender-sensitive curriculum for gender awareness training seminars for all members of parliament, and induction for new members” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>163</sup> “Provide gender awareness training seminars for all parliamentary staff to explain the principles of gender equality and why a gender sensitive parliament benefits everyone.” (Plan of Action 2017)

“Institute ...equality and diversity training for both staff and Members” (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

## Background

Many reports pointed to a tendency for Prime Minister's Questions to be a moment when bullying, abuse, sexist language and bad behaviour come to the fore. Reports pointed more broadly to behaviour in the Chamber as an area of concern for addressing the inclusivity of Parliament.<sup>164</sup> Free speech within the Chamber is rigorously protected and largely exempt from any rules. Orderliness in the Chamber is a matter for the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers, and appropriate behaviour is outlined in *Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons*.<sup>165</sup>

## Outstanding recommendations

- The Speaker: Consider sanctions for unprofessional behaviour – including sexist language, personal insults and bullying - in the Chamber.<sup>166</sup>
- Procedure Committee: Trial new formats of Prime Minister's Questions where professional behaviour is encouraged.<sup>167</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

There should be greater clarity for MPs as to what is appropriate behaviour in the Chamber. It might be that there is a need for clearer sanctions for offensive behaviour in the Chamber. Rowdy and offensive behaviour acts to silence and intimidate, while also putting the House of Commons into disrepute. The adversarial nature of Prime Minister's Questions clearly brings out the worst in some Members. One suggestion for a more respectful PMQs might involve questioners being heard in silence.

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<sup>164</sup> Improving Parliament 2014; The Good Parliament 2016; UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018

<sup>165</sup> House of Commons Committee on Standards, (2022) New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules; House of Commons (2021) Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons

<sup>166</sup> "Create a zero tolerance response to unprofessional behaviour in the Chamber, especially during Prime Ministers Questions. The standard of behaviour in the Chamber should be what is accepted in other work environments, for example no abuse, personal insults, bullying, 'ganging up', unprofessional language and bad behaviour. If behaviour fails to improve, additional 'rules and sanctions' may need to be created... This requires the Speaker to define what behaviour is unacceptable in the House and consider what additional sanctions might be applied. One possibility would be for the Chair to decline to call an offending Member to speak for a period of days." (Improving Parliament 2014);

"improve sanctions against those who break the rules" (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>167</sup> "Trial new formats for Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs)" (The Good Parliament 2016)

## Protections from external abuse

	Sources for the recommendations						Recommendations largely met					
	UK Parliament reports			International Best Practice				Recommendations partially met				
	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Plan of Action (2017)	Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians (2016) <sup>168</sup>	A House for Everyone (2023)			Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	The Good Parliament (2016)	Improving Parliament (2014)
Security measures			X			X			X			
Tackling online abuse						X			X	X		

## Security measures available to Members and staff.

### Rating: Recommendations largely met – but security for MPs continues to be an issue

#### Background

The tragic murders of Jo Cox and Sir David Amess highlight the very real physical safety risks which MPs face. Previous reports have stressed the importance of physical safety of MPs and flagged concerns about ensuring there is clarity for MPs as to which bodies might provide this security. Information on current provision is largely restricted due to security concerns.

Currently, all MPs are provided with guidance and advice about security measures they should adopt for their homes and constituency offices from the Members' Security Support Service. Members' staff also benefit from this support. There is also a Parliamentary Liaison and Investigations Team (PLaIT) which is a key central contact for parliamentarians and staff. PLaIT provides advice on a range of security issues while at Westminster. Parliamentarians are provided with updated and tailored advice about incidents, threats and concerns. Members are made aware of the service provision through regular communications such as Speakers' notices and take up of provision is high. The security team within Parliament is in close contact with local police security provision within the constituency.

These measures largely meet the recommendations set out by the Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018.<sup>169</sup> Unfortunately, the report *House for Everyone* points to women MPs in particular having ongoing concerns about their safety. It is unclear how well security provisions address these gender differences.

International recommendations suggest that gender expertise and sensitivity to gendered aspects of violence should be integrated into the security provision. Currently the Members' Security Support Service is a diverse team and Equality Impact

<sup>168</sup> This report is included in this section as it deals specifically with questions around violence abuse and safety.

<sup>169</sup> "We recommend that the parliamentary authorities take steps to ensure that: MPs, peers and all staff are aware of the support available from their local police and the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team to address abuse and threats via social media, as well as other appropriate support from the Members' Security Support Service and Health Assured, the Employee Assistance Programme" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)



Assessments are conducted whenever substantive changes or reforms are put in place.<sup>170</sup> However, the diversity and expertise of the team is liable to change unless rules and structures are put in place to embed gender sensitivity.

### Outstanding recommendations

- Members' Security Support Service: Embed gender sensitivity into structure of the service through the presence of a gender expert within the team, training on responses to gender-based violence and through ensuring gender equality policies are in place.<sup>171</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

Much has been done to ensure that sufficient security is provided to Members of Parliament in recent years and to increase awareness among MPs and their staff about the support available. These activities should be ongoing as the safety of Members and their staff – including outside of Westminster – is of paramount importance.

To bring the UK in line with international best practice the security staff should embed gender sensitivity into the structure of the service to ensure that the team going forwards remains sensitive to gendered aspects of violence.

It is worth considering whether there should be surveys of Members on their views of security provision to ensure the current practices are sufficient from their perspective.

## Tackling online abuse

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

The rise of social media platforms has spurred an increase in online abuse including towards parliamentarians especially women, and Black and Minority Ethnic MPs. Research suggests this is highly gendered, often misogynistic and racist.<sup>172</sup> Often this spills over into very real concerns about physical safety with abuse often including threats of violence. Understandably, many reports point to addressing this online abuse as an important priority.<sup>173</sup>

Currently, the Members' Security Support Service take a holistic approach in supporting MPs including looking at social media, and any impact that might have upon anxiety and mental health and are able to refer MPs to parliamentary support services.<sup>174</sup> Further campaigns run by the House of Commons Commission encourage MPs to report abuse and intimidation they are receiving and providing information on the support available.<sup>175</sup>

In terms of prevention, the *Online Safety Bill* (in the Lords at the time of writing), has been put forth by the Government as the mechanism to address online abuse. It is set to introduce harmful, false, and threatening communications offences, and a cyberflashing offence. While this bill is not directly focused on parliamentarians, it is hoped that it will also capture online abuse

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<sup>170</sup> Communication with Members' Security Support Service (May 2023)

<sup>171</sup> "Members of [parliamentary security] services must be trained in and sensitized to how to respond to gender-based violence. They may decide to conduct a security audit of parliamentary premises and constituency offices to evaluate whether additional measures are necessary to ensure the security of parliamentarians and their staff, particularly women – especially when they are required to work late into the night or to deal with very aggressive people." (Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016)

"Are gender experts present, and gender equality policies in place, in the following parliamentary departments and services: ...Security teams" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

<sup>172</sup> Harmer, E. and Southern, R. (2021) 'Women and minority MPs are particularly at risk of experiencing certain forms of abuse on Twitter', *LSE British Politics and Policy*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/twitter-abuse-mps/>

Watson, S. (2019) 'Analysis shows horrifying extent of abuse sent to women MPs via Twitter', *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/analysis-shows-horrifying-extent-of-abuse-sent-to-women-mps-via-twitter-126166>

<sup>173</sup> UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018; Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022;

"It is also necessary for laws to be complete and cover new forms of violence, particularly online threats and other forms of cyberviolence." (Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians 2016)

<sup>174</sup> Communication with Members' Security Support Service (May 2023)

<sup>175</sup> House of Commons Commission (2022) Gender Sensitive Parliament audit: 2022 submission to the Women and Equalities Committee

directed towards them. However, the *Online Safety Bill* has been criticised as being inadequate by organisations advocating against violence against women and girls.<sup>176</sup> Importantly, the *Online Safety Bill* includes clauses to ensure that its effectiveness is measured.<sup>177</sup>

The *Elections Act 2022* has introduced a new electoral sanction for those convicted of intimidation against a candidate, campaigner or elected office holder.<sup>178</sup> This would be in addition to any punishment for the underlying criminal offence.

This legislation addresses some of the recommendations from previous reports however the impact on online abuse is as yet unclear.

### Outstanding recommendations

- Government, Women and Equalities Committee and Home Office Select Committee: Monitor the effectiveness of the *Online Safety Bill* and *Elections Act* specifically in protecting women parliamentary candidates and MPs, especially those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, from threatening and harmful online harassment and abuse.<sup>179</sup>
- Government: Ensure the Electoral Commission and local police are sufficiently resourced and equipped to enforce legal sanctions for intimidating candidates, campaigners, and representatives during election periods.<sup>180</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action.

Online abuse, harassment and threats are impacting women – deterring them from pursuing a career in politics and affecting when they speak and what they speak about.<sup>181</sup> While the legislative changes outlined above meet the recommendations, it is crucial that the *Online Safety Bill* is monitored and amended if it is found to be ineffective, with particular attention being paid to the gendered and intersectional nature of abuse. Further, enhanced support may be required for the current protections conferred by the *Elections Act*. This issue has been a growing concern among women in public office and requires serious dedicated attention. If the current legislation is insufficient, then further measures may need to be considered.

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<sup>176</sup> Vera-Gray, F. and McGlynn, C. 'VAWG Principles for the Online Safety Bill'. <file:///C:/Users/k2040374/Downloads/Online-Safety-Bill-Full-Brief-final.pdf>

<sup>177</sup> House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2022) Equality in the heart of democracy: A gender sensitive House of Commons: responses to the Committee's fifth report of session 2021-2022  
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22678/documents/166671/default/> (ppv-vi)

<sup>178</sup> Government (2022) Greater protections for voters as government's Elections Bill achieves Royal Assent  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greater-protections-for-voters-as-governments-elections-bill-achieves-royal-assent#:~:text=The%20sanction%20would%20ban%20offenders,the%20severity%20of%20the%20intimidation>

<sup>179</sup> Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2022-2023

<sup>180</sup> A House for Everyone 2023

<sup>181</sup> Collington S. and Rüdiger, W. (2021) 'Increasing the cost of female representation? The gendered effects of harassment, abuse and intimidation towards Parliamentary candidates in the UK', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol 31 (4), pp. 429-449; A House for Everyone 2023,



## Inclusive facilities, culture and practices

	Sources for the recommendations									Recommendations largely met	
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice					
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)	Recommendations partially met	
Inquiry into House practices	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				Recommendations not met
Diverse art in Parliament	X	X	X				X				
Parliamentary identity passes	X	X									
Revision of dress code		X									

Parliamentary facilities and their role in supporting an inclusive culture have been touched upon above in the sections on children in Parliament and support for disabled MPs. This section includes certain aspects of the facilities of Parliament that have not been addressed above.

### Inquiry into House practices

**Rating: Recommendations not met**

#### Background

Many of the practices within the Chamber and in Parliament are outdated and can be exclusionary. Standing Orders are often difficult to decipher, and many of the traditions and practices are opaque to new members. Additionally, current practices may disadvantage certain groups. One example, mentioned in three reports, is the requirements for ‘bobbing’ in the House to indicate a Member wants to speak, which is difficult for disabled MPs, pregnant MPs, and those with a range of health conditions.<sup>182</sup> While there are alternatives used by those with disabilities, it is important that there is transparency and that unwritten practices and traditions do not exclude or disadvantage MPs of different backgrounds and health requirements.

<sup>182</sup> The Good Parliament 2016; UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018; The Remotely Representative House 2021

## Outstanding recommendations

- Procedure Committee with House of Commons Commission: Conduct a joint inquiry into gender sensitivity of parliamentary rituals, practices, ceremonies and language to improve transparency with recommendations made highlighting where changes need to be made to make Parliament more inclusive.<sup>183</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

The need for a gender sensitive analysis of House practices is clear. Critically, such a review must be intersectional with a focus on how the effects of racism, ableism and classism overlap and impact those from minoritised backgrounds.

## Diverse art in Parliament

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Many reports highlighted the need for diverse artwork to be displayed in Westminster, in order to create a culture which feels welcoming and inclusive.<sup>184</sup>

Diverse artwork and representation are a focus of the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art. They have acted on several of the recommendations from previous reports. For example, the '10 year rule' where portraits of an individual were prohibited from being displayed until ten years after their death in the Palace of Westminster, was replaced after a 2016 review by a 'two terms rule', whereby those who have been out of office for two terms are now able to be represented in artwork in the Palace.<sup>185</sup> In 2020 the committee committed to a number of measures with a focus on improving representation and diversity in the Parliamentary Art Collection. As the Collection is 'broadly fixed' the focus has been on improving diversity through commissions and acquisitions, as well as through highlighting and questioning certain aspects of the current collection. On these points a newly formed Collections Advisory Group advises on how to improve diversity of representation in Parliament's collection, and they now publish lists of artwork which capture ethnic diversity, and links to the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>186</sup>

## Outstanding recommendations

- Restoration and Renewal Client Board: Ensure diverse artwork is embedded into ongoing Restoration and Renewal processes.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> "Ask the House to undertake an equality audit of House practices, culture, ceremonies and language to help demystify Parliament" (Improving Parliament 2014);

"Ensure that House rules and structures, institutions, nomenclature and culture are diversity sensitive and inclusionary" (The Good Parliament 2016)

"Consideration should then be given to possible steps that might be taken to ensure that any barriers to intervening are addressed, including the method by which parliamentarians indicate they want to speak." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

[Conduct a survey of MPs on:] "the House's working practices and their effects on participation in House of Commons proceedings by parents, carers, disabled people and those with long-term health conditions." (Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022);

"Conduct a gender-based analysis of parliamentary rituals, dress codes, forms of address and commonly used language, conventions and rules." (Plan of Action 2017);

"Has your parliament undertaken a 'gender sensitive review' of any of the following? ... Informal norms and conventions, e.g. ceremonies, rituals, the use of masculine language and style of political interaction," (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

"Launch an inquiry, using the recommendations from The Good Parliament as the basis, examining how to make the rules, structures, institutions, nomenclature and working practices diversity sensitive and inclusive." (House for Everyone 2023)

<sup>184</sup> Improving Parliament 2014; The Good Parliament 2016; UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018;

<sup>185</sup> "Abolish the '10 year dead' rule, whereby only individuals who have been dead for at least a decade are represented in the artworks in the Palace of Westminster" (The Good Parliament 2016); Communication with Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art (April-May 2023)

<sup>186</sup> The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art (2020) Reviewing and updating the Parliamentary Art Collection

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/301/speakers-advisory-committee-on-works-of-art/content/119630/reviewing-and-updating-the-parliamentary-art-collection/>

<sup>187</sup> "Commit to diverse artwork in a restored Palace of Westminster" (The Good Parliament 2016);

"the Restoration & Renewal programme is an opportunity to continue progress in increasing the inclusivity of parliamentary artwork" (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

- Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art: Conduct a gender audit of artwork and continue to review and redress gender balance of subjects and artists.<sup>188</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action:

Considerable progress has been made in diversifying the Parliamentary Art Collection. However, to fully meet the recommendations in the future, regular audits and reviews should be instigated and a commitment to diverse art must be built into the Restoration and Renewal process.

## Parliamentary identity passes

### Rating: Recommendations largely met – but unclear whether underlying issue has been addressed

#### Background

MPs, particularly young women and those who are Black and Minority Ethnic or from minority religious groups, have spoken about how they have been stopped often by security and asked whether they were permitted to be in certain areas. These experiences speak to broader observations about Parliament's exclusionary culture, and can contribute to MPs feeling as though Parliament is not a place for them. Two reports suggested re-designing the passes to ensure they are double sided with larger names and photographs.<sup>189</sup> These have subsequently been changed.

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Director of Security for Parliament: Provide support for administration staff who are required to enforce the rules, such as around pass-wearing.<sup>190</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

It is unclear whether the changes to the identity pass have addressed the underlying issue that certain staff members and MPs, especially those who are Black and Minority Ethnic, feel that their passes are checked excessively. This is perhaps symptomatic of a wider discriminatory environment.<sup>191</sup>

## Revision of dress code

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

*The Good Parliament* recommended revising the dress code to 'business dress' or 'national costume'.<sup>192</sup> The Speaker's *Rules of behaviour* stipulates 'business attire'. However, limitations are given, such as for men jackets are obligatory and they are encouraged to wear ties. As such this recommendation has been partially addressed, but restrictions remain in place.<sup>193</sup>

### Discussion and recommended action

The recommendation in *The Good Parliament* was intended as a way to remove the different standards for men and women in terms of dress. Dress is highly gendered and the stipulation that jackets are obligatory for men reinforces these gender

<sup>188</sup> "Ask the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art to: Commission a gender audit of artwork currently on display in the Palace" "Ask the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art to: Regularly review artwork to ensure the House presents diverse visual representations for visitors" (Improving Parliament 2014);

<sup>189</sup> "Re-design the parliament pass so MPs are more easily identifiable." (Improving Parliament 2014);

"Re-design the parliamentary identity pass." (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>190</sup> "Support for Administration staff who are required to enforce the rules of the two Houses, such as around pass-wearing." (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)

<sup>191</sup> ParliREACH, 'Stand in my shoes: race and culture in Parliament: A ParliREACH report

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/foi/201041pr.pdf>

<sup>192</sup> "Revise the dress code to 'business dress' or 'national costume'." (The Good Parliament 2016)

<sup>193</sup> House of Commons (2021) Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons

differences, undermining the intention of the revision to ‘business attire’ which allows more flexibility. A more flexible dress code has the additional benefit of recognising that western business dress is not the only form of dress appropriate for the House.

# Women's substantive representation

Having an inclusive and diverse House of Commons is important in and of itself. However, there are important democratic outcomes that can follow from this diversity. When there are more women in the House of Commons, women's views should be better represented in the legislative process. Studies show that numbers are important, but not always sufficient, for seeing an increase in gender responsiveness in the legislation.<sup>194</sup> Within the context of Parliament, the provision of information and institutions can support and amplify the ability of parliamentarians to ensure legislation is sensitive to gender differences, and to create policies which represent the needs of women.

There has been one major point of progress in the last decade, and that is the establishment of the Women and Equalities Committee on a permanent basis in 2017. This fulfils recommendations from previous reports. The areas which still need work are around providing the expertise to MPs and their staff so they are better able to draft, scrutinise and amend legislation from a gender perspective. The international best practice recommendations point to the importance of having a women's caucus and ensuring that legislation which is produced is subjected to a gender impact assessment.

## Key recommendations

1. Introduce training in gender analysis, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender impact assessments, gender-sensitive public consultations, unconscious bias and equality legislation for all Members and staff.
2. Ensure there is well signposted information and expertise on gender available to Members and their staff, through technical research units, expertise within the library or research staff in Parliament or through formalised relationships with external gender experts.
3. Require legislation to be informed by equality impact assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting and targeted public consultations.
4. Require committees to conduct an equality impact assessment as a standard practice for each inquiry.
5. Create a women's caucus.

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<sup>194</sup> Cowper-Coles, M. (2021) Women Political Leaders: The Impact of Gender on Democracy

## Gender-sensitive and intersectional policymaking

	Sources for the recommendations									Recommendations not met	Recommendations partially met	Recommendations largely met
	UK Parliament reports					International Best Practice						
	Improving Parliament (2014)	The Good Parliament (2016)	UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit (2018)	Equality in the Heart of Democracy 2021-2022	A House for Everyone (2023)	Plan of Action (2017)	Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines (2020)	Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament (2021)	Effective and Inclusive Parliaments (2022)			
Women and Equalities Committee	X	X	X			X	X					X
Improving understanding of gender impacts						X	X	X	X	X		
Gender sensitive legislation						X	X	X			X	
Parliamentary women’s caucus						X	X				X	

### Women and Equalities Committee

#### Rating: Recommendations largely met

##### Summary

Several reports called for the establishment of a Women and Equalities Committee on a permanent basis. Having a dedicated parliamentary committee for reviewing policies, legislation and budgets through intersectional equalities perspective fits with international best practice. The Women and Equalities Committee was established in 2015 and made permanent in 2017, meaning this recommendation has been met.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>195</sup> “Establish a Women & Equalities Select Committee to raise issues that are a priority for women and to review how women are impacted by Government policy.” (Improving Parliament 2014)

“Put before the House a motion to establish the Women and Equalities Committee as a permanent select committee of the House, by amending Standing Order No. 152” (The Good Parliament 2016)

“A dedicated parliamentary committee on gender equality entrusted with reviewing government policies, legislation and budgets from a gender perspective, where committee members question a broad range of groups and individuals, including public agencies, academics and private organizations, about their views on the effectiveness of government programmes and activities, and where strong links are forged between the committee and national women's machineries, civil society organizations (CSOs), research institutes and universities.” “Ensure that committees investigating gender equality concerns have sufficient time and resources (including staff with gender expertise) to fulfil their mandate, an opportunity to report back to the plenary on their work and recommendations as well as the same

## Improving understanding of gender impacts

### Rating: Recommendations not met

#### Background

There is a need for MPs and their staff to have knowledge and understanding of gender impacts to ensure that legislation and policy is sensitive to gender and diversity. Critically, as there are gender implications for all policy decisions, all MPs and their staff should feel confident in identifying and discussing these issues including from an intersectional perspective.

Provision of training and expertise on gender budgeting and mainstreaming is prominent in the international best practice literature. However, this is not provided or clearly signposted in the House of Commons.

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Members' Services Team: Introduce training in gender analysis, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender impact assessments, gender-sensitive public consultations, unconscious bias and equality legislation for all Members and staff.<sup>196</sup>
- House of Commons Library with new Advisory Group: Develop clear gender-based legislative assessment guidelines or toolkits.<sup>197</sup>
- House of Commons Library and Members' Services Team: Ensure there is well signposted information and expertise on gender available to Members and their staff, through technical research units, expertise within the library or research staff in Parliament or through formalised relationships with external gender experts.<sup>198</sup>

#### Discussion and recommended action

Further provision on gender-sensitivity and gender analysis would improve the gender-sensitivity of the legislative process. Departmental Select Committee chairs and staff should be trained in gender mainstreaming and budgeting in order to fulfil their roles in scrutinising legislation.

To reach international best practice, gender-sensitive legislation guidelines could be formed, and gender expertise within the Houses of Parliament clearly signposted. These resources should be shared with Members and their staff. It is unclear what level of expertise is currently available, so a first step must be to review current provision and relationships, and to bring all this information together on the 'diversity dashboard' that might be formed by the House of Commons Library with support from the new Advisory Group.

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*powers and responsibilities as any other parliamentary committee (e.g. call for written evidence, hear from witnesses and ministers and report on findings and recommendations).*" (Plan of Action 2017)

*"If your parliament has a formal women's committee, does it (a) scrutinise the work ('outputs') of parliament, e.g. laws, scrutiny, representation; (b) monitor and judge parliament as a gender sensitive institution; and (c) hold to account the responsible government Minister/Department dealing with women's issues"* (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

<sup>196</sup> *"Existing Continuous Professional Development options for MPs should be expanded to include unconscious bias, equality legislation."* (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018);

*"Offer MPs, parliamentary and political staff professional development courses in gender analysis, gender impact assessments and gender-sensitive public consultations;"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021);

*"Institute voluntary training on gender budgeting and mainstreaming within/alongside equality and diversity training for both staff and Members, if not already being offered ... Consider the making of gender budgeting and mainstreaming training mandatory for all members and staff"* (Effective and Inclusive Parliaments 2022)

<sup>197</sup> *"Develop clear gender-based legislative assessment guidelines or toolkits (e.g. a gender-based checklist for all pieces of legislation, including the budget)." (Plan of Action 2017);*

*"Designing, based on existing templates and toolkits, bespoke GSL frameworks that suit their own parliamentary context, including a checklist and guidance on how to use it;"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>198</sup> *"Technical research units on gender equality or library/research staff with gender expertise who have access to up-to-date information, books, computers and online databases and who can assist with gender-based analyses."* (Plan of Action 2017);

*"Establishing and formalizing stakeholder relationships with gender experts across diverse policy areas from academia, civil society organizations and the private sector, and drawing on this expertise in legislative and budgetary deliberation;"* (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

## Gender sensitive legislation

### Rating: Recommendations partially met

#### Background

Although substantive representation was not included in all the key reports, international best practice points to a number of ways in which legislation can be made gender sensitive, through embedding gender reviews in the law-making process. As it stands the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to have due regard for equality considerations when exercising their functions, and Equality Impact Assessments are regularly conducted by public bodies when introducing new politics – but these are not mandated by law.

#### Outstanding recommendations

- Government: Conduct a comprehensive review of gender equality law ensuring that it is fit for purpose.<sup>199</sup>
- Government: Require legislation to be informed by equality impact assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting and targeted public consultations.<sup>200</sup>
- Commons Liaison Committee: Require committees to conduct an equality impact assessment as a standard practice for each inquiry.<sup>201</sup>
- Government: Require departments to collect and publish disaggregated data relating to protected characteristics in a way that facilitates an intersectional understanding of how different characteristics interact.<sup>202</sup>

#### Discussion and recommended action

The Equality Act 2010 set the foundation for the current assessments of gendered policy impacts, but it needs to be reformed as outlined above in order to meet the requirements of international best practice. The first step would be to review the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that it has acted sufficiently to embed gender sensitivity into the creation and implementation of laws.

## Parliamentary women's caucus

### Rating: Recommendation partially met

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<sup>199</sup> “Enact laws that promote and protect gender equality; where gender equality laws were enacted but have become outdated or were enacted more than 10 years ago, parliaments should review such legislation to include gender mainstreaming frameworks and mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing implementation.” (Plan of Action 2017);

<sup>200</sup> “Consider introducing a law and/or mechanisms that require all government policy and legislation to be reviewed and assessed for their gender impact and compliance with the State’s obligations under relevant international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights” (Plan of Action 2017)

“Is there a law requiring all government policy and legislation to be reviewed, with regard to: Gender equality impacts; Gender budgeting; Compatibility with international conventions (e.g. CEDAW, UNCHR, International covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and International covenant on Economic and Social rights.)” (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020);

“Requiring, by law, that all government policies and legislation be reviewed and assessed before and after for their gender impact and compliance with national obligations under relevant international normative frameworks, requiring that assessment reports be made available to the public and submitted directly to the parliament, and considering the appropriateness of sanctions for non-compliance with impact assessments;” “Requiring, by law, the practice of gender-responsive budgeting to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and impact of all policy measures, specifically by studying any budget cuts and advocating against cuts to programmes or initiatives meant to support women and gender equality.” “Requiring, by law, and formalizing the mandatory practice of targeted public consultations so that women and representatives of minority groups could be involved in consultation proceedings on legislation that may affect them (consultation strategies need to adapt their timing and methods of consultation accordingly, by enhancing outreach for particularly marginalized groups, conducting smaller or larger, local or regional, or online or offline events, depending on the respective groups and their needs—translation and interpretation also need to be planned);” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)

<sup>201</sup> “Mainstreaming gender throughout all parliamentary committees, so that all committee members – men and women – are mandated to address the gender implications of the policy, legislative and budgetary matters under their consideration as appropriate, supported by parliamentary research staff with gender expertise” (Plan of Action 2017)

<sup>202</sup> “Requiring, by law, comprehensive government data broken down by multiple demographic indicators including sex, and continue to advocate for more inclusive data collection practices;” (Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament 2021)



## Background

In the UK there is no cross-party women's caucus, but there is substantial work which takes place on these agendas within the political parties and more broadly within Parliament including through the APPG Women in Parliament and the Women and Equalities Committee. International best practice recommendations point to a parliamentary women's caucus as being an important part of the infrastructure required to push forward the women's agenda.

## Outstanding recommendations

- Women in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group and Women and Equalities Committee: Establish a parliamentary women's caucus.<sup>203</sup>

## Discussion and recommended action

International best practice holds that a cross-party women's caucus is one of the most effective tools for ensuring the substantive representation of women. As such political parties should convene and consider how a cross-party caucus could complement existing bodies and help drive the diversity sensitive agenda.

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<sup>203</sup> "A women's parliamentary caucus with a special remit for gender equality concerns, composed of women (and men, if desired) working on a commonly agreed agenda. An effective caucus relies on strong links with national women's machineries, CSOs and research institutes and universities." (Plan of Action 2017); "Does your parliament have any of the following 'gendered parliamentary bodies': a women's caucus" (Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines 2020); "To WIP APPG, Women's PLP, Conservative Women's Caucus and all women MPs: Establish a formal Parliamentary Women's Caucus to lead on the gender sensitive House of Commons agenda and support a new Reference Group and the diversity sensitive parliaments agenda." (The Remotely Representative House 2021)

# Conclusion

Reading the previous sections, the task ahead can appear daunting. It calls upon 29 different bodies to take 92 actions – many of which are large scale recommendations, such as inquiries, reviews and legislative changes. With such a mountain of work ahead it is important to remember how much has been achieved in the relatively short period since the first of these report.

Since the *Improving Parliament* report was published in 2014 the percentage of women MPs has increased by over ten percent, and the UK has had two more women Prime Ministers. Undoubtedly, the diversity of politicians in the UK has increased, with over 50 percent more MPs elected in 2019 as compared to the 2015 general election. The parliamentary Education and Engagement Team have ensured that materials about being an MP also reflect an aspiration for increasing diversity.

Within the committees and leadership of Parliament, other major changes can be seen. There is currently a woman Leader of the House, and women chair the Foreign Affairs and Treasury Select Committees as well as the Procedure Committee. These are key roles, and ones that have been predominantly held by men. Perhaps most importantly, a permanent select committee – the Women and Equalities Committee – has been set up to scrutinise the government from the perspective of gender and equality.

Parliament has also taken a serious look at itself as an institution, thanks to all the key reports here as well as countless others, and major reforms have taken place to try to make it a better place to work for women. The introduction of the ICGS and the accompanying Behaviour Code has highlighted the desire in the UK Parliament to become a safe and supportive work environment, where abuse and harassment are not tolerated

Importantly, there have also been developments to support MPs with caring responsibilities and health issues. Proxy voting has been introduced for MPs on baby leave with funds provided to cover additional constituency staff. These are important steps, but much more needs to be done to make it an institution where the culture is truly inclusive.

The scope of this audit has been broad and shows the breadth of work that is needed. The UK Parliament is a venerable institution, but it needs to reform to ensure that it upholds the democratic values that it symbolises.

When Parliament has been successful in bringing about reforms to become more inclusive it has been through a combination of political leadership, the mobilization of women MPs, and support from men allies and of course with alongside the provision institutional resources. With the centenary of the Equal Franchise Act approaching, the impetus for change is here. After the upheaval of Covid and the division surrounding Brexit, there is a need for a new settlement. It is the time for the Commons to act.

In order to for Parliament to tackle the multitude of reviews and reforms that are required, it needs a guiding body which can keep up the momentum for reform, monitor changes and celebrate progress. For this reason, the key recommendation from this audit is to set up a new Advisory Group which can spearhead reform into the future.

# Recommendation by Relevant Body

## Administration Committee

- Assess the sufficiency of facilities to support unsociable hours, for health and wellbeing as well as childcare provision, through a survey of members and address the results.
- Assess the sufficiency and availability for both men and women of facilities for baby changing, breastfeeding and expressing milk for MPs, staff and visitors.
- Consider creating a crèche facility in Parliament.

## Commons Executive Board

- (with Members' Services Team and House of Commons Commission): Survey MPs on the adequacy of facilities in meeting the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions – and act on findings.

## Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

- (working with Women and Equalities Committee) Review sexism in the UK media, including political coverage of female parliamentarians and make recommendations to government and Independent Press Standards Organisation.

## Director of Security for Parliament

- Provide support for administration staff who are required to enforce the rules, such as around pass-wearing

## Education and Engagement Team

- (and Parliamentary Digital Service): Continue efforts to produce website materials and a communications and outreach strategy to highlight diversity of MPs, their impact, to clarify further the role of an MP and to promote women parliamentarians as role models.
- Improve engagement with organisations supporting the increased diversity and inclusivity of Parliament.
- Conduct awareness-raising to emphasise the importance of women's representation in Parliament.
- Support mentorship programmes.

## General Election Planning Group

- (with Members' Services Team) Provide a robust induction process for new MPs, with particular support aimed at women and those from other underrepresented groups.

## Government

- Enact section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, which requires political parties to report the diversity of their selected candidates.
- Introduce statutory sex/gender quotas for parliamentary candidates.
- Introduce permissive legislation to allow for party quotas for other under-represented groups.
- Create a permanent fund to help create a diverse and more representative Parliament – with particular emphasis on financial support for disabled people to stand for election.
- Regularly assess and improve effectiveness of funding provided.
- Consider what more can be done in state-funded schools and academies to teach children about engaging in democracy.
- (with Leader of the House) Improve the predictability of the parliamentary calendar and scheduling of business.
- Introduce legislation to allow for parental leave for MPs in which all their work in the constituency and Parliament can be covered.
- Review legislation to allow (a trial of) job-sharing for MPs.
- Expand the current maternity leave to include parental leave for ministers.

- Ensure MPs have greater access to legal protections in relation to sexual harassment
- (with Women and Equalities and Home Office Select Committees): Monitor the effectiveness of the *Online Safety Bill* and *Elections Act* specifically in protecting women parliamentary candidates and MPs, especially those who are Black and Minority Ethnic, from threatening and harmful online harassment and abuse.
- Ensure the Electoral Commission and local police are sufficiently resourced and equipped to enforce legal sanctions for intimidating candidates, campaigners, and representatives during election periods.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of gender equality law ensuring that it is fit for purpose.
- Require legislation to be informed by equality impact assessments, gender-sensitive budgeting and targeted public consultations.
- Require departments to collect and publish disaggregated data relating to protected characteristics in a way that facilitates an intersectional understanding of how different characteristics interact.

## Home Office Select Committee

- (with Government and Women and Equalities Committee): Monitor the effectiveness of the *Online Safety Bill* and *Elections Act* specifically in protecting women parliamentary candidates and MPs, especially those who are Black and Minority Ethnic, from threatening and harmful online harassment and abuse.

## House of Commons Commission

- (with Members' Services Team and Commons Executive Board): Survey MPs on the adequacy of facilities in meeting the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions – and act on findings.
- Commit to regularly collecting and publish diversity data on all MPs and those in leadership positions.
- (with Speaker and Parliamentary Digital Service): Develop a parliamentary policy for children and families, and an information tool for parents working in Parliament.
- (with Procedure Committee): Conduct a joint inquiry into gender sensitivity of parliamentary rituals, practices, ceremonies and language to improve transparency with recommendations made highlighting where changes need to be made to make Parliament more inclusive

## House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team

- (with Members' Services Team): Expand provision of Continuous Professional Development and training for MPs and staff, to include unconscious bias training, parliamentary procedure, best practice on public speaking, voice coaching, equality legislation, equality and diversity, witness questioning techniques, gender analysis, gender impact assessments, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender-sensitive public consultations and media interviews.
- (with Members' Services Team): Ensure MPs and staff are aware of the in-House training and support and funding available to them as well as where and how they can access the groups and organisations within Parliament with specialist knowledge.
- Collect and publish data on staff, staff in leadership positions, participation in delegation travel and uptake of training.
- (with ICGS and Members' Services Team): Consider requiring current training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.

## House of Commons' Head of Access and Services

- Review access and facilities for children to Parliament, including breastfeeding in the Chamber and Westminster Hall, the adequacy of family rooms, and accessible parking for parents and carers.

## House of Commons Library

- Collect and publish data on members speeches and interventions in debates, questions, private members' bills and other parliamentary activities disaggregated by sex and other major social characteristics.
- (with new Advisory Group): Publish and make accessible the diversity data collected by the ICGS, House of Commons Commission, Commons Liaison Committee, Speaker, Procedure Committee, Members' Services Team, and House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and any other body routinely gathering diversity data.
- (with Members' Services Team): Ensure there is well-signposted information and expertise on gender available to Members and their staff, through technical research units, expertise within the library or research staff in Parliament or through formalised relationships with external gender experts.
- (with new Advisory Group): Develop clear gender-based legislative assessment guidelines or toolkits.

## ICGS

- Publish sex-disaggregated data on harassment, bullying and sexual misconduct.
- Continue to review the scheme regularly and whether there is adequate support for whistle blowers, and consider how the scheme might better identify and respond to inappropriate behaviour, including third party reporting.
- (with Members' Services Team): Consider whether to provide training to support Members and staff having difficult conversations.
- (with Standards Committee): Require parliamentarians to make a commitment that they will uphold the *Behaviour Code* and promote an inclusive workplace culture.
- Include provisions in relevant parliamentary policies which recognise violence against women, the importance of intersectionality and highlight the unacceptability of sexism.
- (with House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and Members' Services Team): Consider requiring current training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.

## IPSA

- Continue to update the Parental Leave Absence Fund to echo any changes made by Parliament to the proxy voting scheme.
- Continue to conduct Equality Impact Assessments of the scheme.
- Assess whether more needs to be done to support MPs childcare costs.
- Record business costs associated with having dependants at the aggregate level.

## Leader of the House

- (with Government) Improve the predictability of the parliamentary calendar and scheduling of business.
- Move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure Committee review of voting practices.
- Move a Motion giving effect to any recommendation of the Procedure Committee on online participation and hybridity, giving the House time for debate and allowing for a free vote.
- (with Procedure Committee) Implement flexible working arrangements (outlined elsewhere in this report) to support MPs with caring responsibilities.

## Liaison Committee – Commons

- (with the Speaker and Procedure Committee) Identify and pilot mechanisms to guarantee gender diversity in leadership positions, through e.g. rotating positions of parliamentary leadership between women and men over a period of time, establishing dual leadership for parliamentary structures with one woman and one man appointed, or requiring either equality or a minimum level of women's participation, or else preferentially recruiting women when a man and woman are equally qualified until equality is reached.
- (with political parties): Prohibit single sex/gender select committees, encourage parties to be mindful of representativeness in election of members to committees and consider adopting formal rules requiring equality or a minimum level of women Members' participation on committees.
- Continue to encourage gender diversity among select committee witness, including through changing rules to ensure this is the case, and/or setting targets.
- Consider introducing sex/gender quotas or alternative special measures for the election of committee chairs.
- Consider ways in which committees might meet virtually or in a hybrid format.
- Collect and publish diversity data on committee membership, chairs, witnesses, special advisors, travel and participation - this is currently only done by gender and for witnesses, more intersectional data on disabilities, ethnicity or other protected characteristics could be included;
- (with Members' Services Team) Collect and publish disaggregated data on Members' uptake of training and participation in travel.
- Set expectations in relation to committee workload.
- Introduce new select committee travel guidelines outlining best practice including restricting travel to weekdays, and parliamentary sitting time where possible and including a provision to cover additional childcare costs incurred in the course of travel.
- Ensure equitable opportunities for committee trips through the provision of funding.
- Ensure gender balance on committee trips.
- Require committees to conduct an equality impact assessment as a standard practice for each inquiry.

## Members' Security Support Service

- Embed gender sensitivity into structure of the service through the presence of a gender expert within the team, training on responses to gender-based violence and through ensuring gender equality policies are in place.

## Members' Services Team

- (with House of Commons Commission and Commons Executive Board): Survey MPs on the adequacy of facilities in meeting the needs and interests of those who are disabled or have long-term health conditions – and act on findings.
- (with General Election Planning Group) Provide a robust induction process for new MPs, with particular support aimed at women and those from other underrepresented groups.
- (with House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team): Expand provision of Continuous Professional Development and training for MPs and staff, to include unconscious bias training, parliamentary procedure, best practice on public speaking, voice coaching, equality legislation, equality and diversity, witness questioning techniques, gender analysis, gender impact assessments, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender-sensitive public consultations and media interviews.
- (with House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team): Ensure MPs and staff are aware of the in-House training and support and funding available to them as well as where and how they can access the groups and organisations within Parliament with specialist knowledge.
- (with new Advisory Group): Conduct regular surveys on MPs experiences and views of childcare, facilities, access and working practices.
- Ensure support – such as training and guidance - is provided to parent MPs returning from leave.
- (with Commons Liaison Committee) Collect and publish disaggregated data on Members' uptake of training and participation in travel.
- (with ICGS): Consider whether to provide training to support Members and staff having difficult conversations.
- (with House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and ICGS): Consider requiring current training on bullying and harassment to be mandatory for all passholders.
- Expand training to explicitly cover gender-awareness, sexism, sexual harassment and unconscious bias.
- Intersectional approaches to be embedded in training materials alongside coverage of broader issues pertaining to equality and diversity including the importance of a gender sensitive parliament.
- Introduce training in gender analysis, gender budgeting and mainstreaming, gender impact assessments, gender-sensitive public consultations, unconscious bias and equality legislation for all Members and staff.
- (with House of Commons Library): Ensure there is well signposted information and expertise on gender available to Members and their staff, through technical research units, expertise within the library or research staff in Parliament or through formalised relationships with external gender experts.

## Parliamentary Digital Service

- (with Education and Engagement Team): Continue efforts to produce website materials and a communications and outreach strategy to highlight diversity of MPs, their impact, to clarify further the role of an MP and to promote women parliamentarians as role models.
- (with House of Commons Commission and the Speaker): Develop a parliamentary policy for children and families, and an information tool for parents working in Parliament.

## Political Parties

- (with Commons Liaison Committee): Prohibit single sex/gender select committees, encourage parties to be mindful of representativeness in election of members to committees and consider adopting formal rules requiring equality or a minimum level of women Members' participation on committees.

## Procedure Committee

- (with the Speaker and Commons Liaison Committee) Identify and pilot mechanisms to guarantee gender diversity in leadership positions, through e.g. rotating positions of parliamentary leadership between women and men over a period of time, establishing dual leadership for parliamentary structures with one woman and one man appointed, or requiring either equality or a minimum level of women's participation, or else preferentially recruiting women when a man and woman are equally qualified until equality is reached.
- Monitor and collect data on use of hybrid technologies and alternative voting.

- Review sitting days and hours.
- Launch a review into voting practices in the House of Commons, including reviewing the establishment of a ‘division time’, where multiple votes could be taken together; reintroducing remote voting, and extending the current proxy voting scheme for parents to 12 months and to include those who are breastfeeding and with other caring responsibilities.
- Undertake an inquiry into the online measures introduced during Covid-19 and highlight measures which should be continued to support greater inclusivity and diversity. The remit should be broad and include, but not be limited to, measures introduced in the Chamber and committee meetings.
- Review extending proxy voting from 7 to 12 months.
- Review making changes to proxy voting to explicitly cover parents through surrogacy.
- Remove reference to ‘due date’ from proxy voting scheme.
- Review extending proxy voting to support MPs with caring responsibilities.
- (with Leader of the House) Implement flexible working arrangements (outlined elsewhere in this report) to support MPs with caring responsibilities.
- Trial new formats of Prime Minister’s Questions where professional behaviour is encouraged.
- (with House of Commons Commission): Conduct a joint inquiry into gender sensitivity of parliamentary rituals, practices, ceremonies and language to improve transparency with recommendations made highlighting where changes need to be made to make Parliament more inclusive.

## Restoration and Renewal Client Board

- Establish an independent advisory panel of experts on gender and diversity sensitivity to advise the restoration and renewal process.
- Request an annual audit of the contribution of the Restoration and Renewal process to gender diverse House of Commons.
- Embed provision of facilities to support hybrid and online participation in Parliament into the restoration and renewal processes.
- Ensure diverse artwork is embedded into ongoing Restoration and Renewal processes.<sup>204</sup>

## Restoration and Renewal

- Use process as a vehicle for trials for better inclusivity.

## Speakers’ Advisory Committee on Works of Art

- Conduct a gender audit of artwork and continue to review and redress gender balance of subjects and artists.

## Standards Committee

- (with ICGS): Require parliamentarians to make a commitment that they will uphold the *Behaviour Code* and promote an inclusive workplace culture.

## The Speaker

- Ensure a more gender-balanced parliamentary press gallery.
- (with Commons Liaison and Procedure Committee) Identify and pilot mechanisms to guarantee gender diversity in leadership positions, through e.g. rotating positions of parliamentary leadership between women and men over a period of time, establishing dual leadership for parliamentary structures with one woman and one man appointed, or requiring either equality or a minimum level of women’s participation, or else preferentially recruiting women when a man and woman are equally qualified until equality is reached.
- Establish a new Advisory Group to lead on the diversity sensitive parliaments agenda.
- Collect and consider publishing information on the percentage of women amongst all media passholders.

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<sup>204</sup> “Commit to diverse artwork in a restored Palace of Westminster” (The Good Parliament 2016);

“the Restoration & Renewal programme is an opportunity to continue progress in increasing the inclusivity of parliamentary artwork” (UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit 2018)



- (with House of Commons Commission and the Parliamentary Digital Service): Develop a parliamentary policy for children and families, and an information tool for parents working in Parliament.
- Consider sanctions for unprofessional behaviour – including sexist language, personal insults and bullying - in the Chamber.

## Women and Equalities Committee

- (with Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee): Review sexism in the UK media, including political coverage of female parliamentarians and make recommendations to government and Independent Press Standards Organisation.
- (with Government and Home Office Select Committees): Monitor the effectiveness of the *Online Safety Bill* and *Elections Act* specifically in protecting women parliamentary candidates and MPs, especially those who are Black and Minority Ethnic, from threatening and harmful online harassment and abuse.
- (with Women in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group): Establish a parliamentary women's caucus.

## Women in Parliament All Party Parliamentary Group

- (with Women and Equalities Committee): Establish a parliamentary women's caucus.

## New Advisory Group

- Secure a cross party commitment to increasing the number of women MPs in lead up to the next general election.
- Encourage men's participation and championing of gender equality for example events pertaining to gender diversity.
- Conduct regular intersectional gender sensitivity audits and publish the results of the audit alongside action plans towards progress.
- (and Members Services): Conduct regular surveys on MPs experiences and views of childcare, facilities, access and working practices.
- (with House of Commons Library): Publish and make accessible the diversity data collected by the ICGS, House of Commons Commission, Commons Liaison Committee, Speaker, Procedure Committee, Members' Services Team, and House of Commons Inclusion and Diversity Team and any other body routinely gathering diversity data.
- (with House of Commons Library): Develop clear gender-based legislative assessment guidelines or toolkits



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## Communications

Representative from IPSA (May 2023)

Representative from Members' Services Team (April-May 2023)

Representative from the Cultural Transformation Team (May 2023)

Representative from the Commons Liaison Committee (April 2023)

Representatives from the House of Commons Library (April-July 2023)

Representative from the House of Commons Procedure Committee (April-May 2023)

Representative from the Members' Security Support Service (May 2023)

Representative from the Restoration and Renewal Client Team (April-May 2023)

Representative from the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art (April-May 2023)

Representative from the Education and Engagement Team (July 2023)

# APPG on Women in Parliament

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Women in Parliament brings together MPs and peers to discuss and campaign for increasing the number of women in Parliament in all parties and, and to support women in Parliament and those standing for public office. The Fawcett Society runs the APPG on behalf of the officers and members.

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